POPULAR LIBRARY

SHE SOLD HERSELF FOR A PHANTOM KINGDOM

224

Sun in their Eyes

This edition has been slightly abridged for your reading pleasure

MONTE BARRETT

A NOVEL OF FRONTIER TEXAS

SUN In Their Eyes

MONTE BARRETT

POPULAR LIBRARY • NEW YORK

POPULAR LIBRARY EDITION

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Some confusion may arise from the similarity of the names Natchitoches and Nacogdoches. Both were derived from the same Indian tribe. Natchitoches, in Louisiana, was naturally the French version; its pronunciation was corrupted to Năk'-ă-tŏsh, with heavy accent on the first syllable and the others somewhat slurred. Nacogdoches is the way the Spaniard spelled it, and it is pronounced Năk-ă-dōsh'-es. The two towns are about a hundred miles apart.

The generous co-operation of Mrs. Edith Wyatt Moore, of Natchez, which contributed greatly to the reconstruction of that city's background, and the volunteered research of Colonel Martin L. Crimmins, U. S. A., retired, which materially assisted in clearing up a number of obscure historical points, is gratefully acknowledged.

This edition has been slightly ebridged
for your reading pleasure

COPYRIGHT, 1944, BY THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published by arrangement with The Bobbs-Merrill Company

PART ONE: *Dawn*

Chapter 1

On Natchez Trace

"WAKE UP, Mist' Jonty," the Negro was saying. "Wake up."

Jonathan Kirk, lingering on the hazy border of sleep, tried to ignore the uneasy voice. It was the spatter of distant rifle fire which roused him. Alert now, he groped for his boots. "What is it?" he demanded.

"Somebody's in plenty of trouble up ahead." Sam Kemper's voice rumbled. "Probably a wagon train, attacked by outlaws."

Another flurry of shots emphasized the need for haste while the saddles were being cinched. Kemper talked as he worked.

"Magee and I will take the lead," he said. "Everybody keep close, and mind, no racket. Our best bet is to take 'em by surprise."

As they left the camp the Trace was still black. The men quickened their pace to a brisk canter as it grew lighter. The musketry ahead continued sporadically and had grown much closer when Kemper drew rein in a small clearing.

"Sounds as if they had 'em surrounded," Magee suggested. "They're probably waiting for broad daylight to make the final rush."

Kemper handed his reins to Gabe. "Wait here," he told the others. "Magee and I will see what's going on."

"Wait?" Jonathan's voice rasped with impatience. "What's

going to happen to those people up ahead while we dawdle around here?"

Kemper eyed his little following briefly. "We've got to know which side we're fightin' on and how the land lays. We won't waste time."

Then, motioning to Magee, he left them. The two men quickly were lost to view in the forest. Ahead, bullets were spitting viciously, and Jonathan, though he had never been under fire before, recognized the menace of the sound. He regretted the impulse that had caused him to question the older man's judgment. Kemper was a legend on this frontier. All during the long ride from Nashville, he had listened to the stories told of him. Kitchens, the wealthy planter, thought of his exploits as brawls.

"The man's a trouble maker," Kitchens had exclaimed one evening as they lounged about the campfire. Kemper was absent on watch.

It was Lieutenant Augustus Magee, three years out of West Point, who told of the West Florida revolt, headed by the Kemper brothers, and their unsuccessful effort to capture the Spanish governor.

"They'd have pulled it off, too," he concluded, "if only the people had risen to help them."

"It's a wonder he hasn't dragged us into a war with Spain before this," Kitchens averred.

"Then it's a pity he hasn't succeeded," Lieutenant Magee retorted. "If the Spaniards are looking for trouble, we can oblige them."

"One war at a time," the planter replied. "According to the prints, we'll be fighting England again before the year is out. And Lord knows, Napoleon's given us just as much cause. He's seized ten million dollars' worth of American shipping in French ports."

"And what has Madison done about it?" The lieutenant scowled. "What have we got in Washington, anyway? A pack of old women?"

"If you're aching to spill some blood, you'll get your wish." Kitchens picked his words with deliberation. "The Congress of 1812 is controlled by young men as impatient as you. Im-

agine, electing Henry Clay speaker on his first day in the House! Youth in the saddle! There will be war."

Jonathan respected Kemper, and his confidence in Magee was almost as great.

He was fingering his rifle impatiently when his friends returned. "They're bandits all right," Kemper commented briefly. "This party is putting up a good fight but we didn't arrive any too soon."

The men stirred restlessly, but Magee halted them.

"Spread out at ten-yard intervals," he instructed. "We'll swing around to the right and catch them in the rear."

Clampit, the gambler, snorted. "What's going to happen up yonder while we're going through all these fancy maneuvers? Let's get in there and help them."

It was Kemper who put an end to the dissension. "The lieutenant's right. If we follow his plan we've a damn good chance to wipe out these vermin."

Kemper's judgment commanded respect. The protests were stilled, and they spread out at the indicated intervals.

"Hold your fire as long as possible," were Magee's final instructions. "Let's wait until every man has a target lined up. I'll give the signal."

Cautiously they crept forward, all but Gabe, who remained with the horses. The defending party had been camped near a small stream and had taken cover in the undergrowth which crowded its bank. The bandits were gradually converging on this point, maintaining a steady fire to cover their movement. Jonathan kept Magee in view and was watching him, impatient for the signal. They were close enough to see the situation clearly now. A large coach stood in a clearing near the embers of a dying campfire. Near it was spilled a man, his inert limbs grotesque. Some distance beyond, a number of horses, excited by the gunfire, were pulling at their picket lines.

Somewhere off to the right there was an angry shout, blurred by the snarl of bullets. Jonathan's stealthy progress brought him only a few yards behind two outlaws who faced the clearing ahead. He glanced uneasily toward Magee for a signal but the lieutenant did not notice. Jonathan's grip tightened on

his rifle; then he was startled by a scream. Evidently a woman had taken refuge in the vehicle when the attack began. The approaching outlaws, taking advantage of her presence, had so maneuvered that the coach was between them and the defenders along the stream. She was directly in the line of fire.

Jonathan waited no longer. Taking quick aim at the first of the bobbing figures, he fired. Then, without pausing, he dashed forward with a shout, brandishing his empty rifle. He knew a fleeting satisfaction as he saw the first of the running bandits go down. The second, caught by surprise, hesitated. Jonathan's rush had carried him into the clearing and now, as the bandit took careful aim at him, it was too late to turn back. Swinging his clubbed gun, he hurled it toward his adversary. The weapon hurtled harmlessly over the man's head.

A bullet snarled past. Another droned into the turf. Then, to his surprise, Jonathan saw the man in front of him drop to the ground. It was only after his antagonist had fallen that Jonathan became aware of the rifle fire behind him when his companions swung into action. Stooping swiftly, he retrieved the loaded weapon of the dead man. But when he turned to join his comrades, the fight was already over. The attack in the rear had taken the outlaws completely by surprise. Those who hadn't fallen in the first volley had fled.

Magee and Clampit were the first men he encountered.

"Come on with me," Magee ordered brusquely. "They'll try to get back to their horses."

Jonathan fell into step behind him. Magee posted them about the picket line, but evidently the rout had been complete, for although they maintained their vigil for more than an hour, no one returned. It was only after he was convinced of this that Magee permitted them to mount and, driving the captured horses before them, proceed to the camp.

They were greeted by a Spaniard short of stature and wearing a rotund paunch below several extra chins. He had turned from Kemper to greet the newcomers.

"Don José Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara at your service, gentlemen. Minister to the United States from the New Philippines."

Magee looked puzzled. "A minister from the New Philippines?"

"He's been telling me they've had a revolution in Mexico," Kemper explained, "headed by a man named Hidalgo. This gentleman was sent to the States to represent the new republican government."

"We heard about it down on the border—" Magee turned to Don Bernardo—"but our news was that the rebellion had been crushed."

"Unfortunately that is true. Hidalgo has been slain, but the idea of liberty, that cannot be erased from the minds of men. . . . But I forget myself, gentlemen." Don Bernardo turned to his companion. "Allow me to present Don Miguel Salazar. We are both greatly in your debt. You arrived just in time."

Don Miguel Salazar was a man of middle years, whose face was slightly pocked, and this was revealed more clearly when, as now, he smiled. "We were glad of your help," he acknowledged, "but we would have defeated them in the end. I was sure of it once we beat off their initial attack."

"How many men did you lose?" Magee asked.

Don Bernardo glanced appraisingly at his party. In addition to the companion he had just introduced, there were a lank, bearded woodsman, obviously an American guide, and three Mexicans. "One of our servants was killed in the first volley," he replied, "and my secretary, Andrada, fell later. There seems to be another missing."

Salazar grunted. "That Luiz!" His voice was contemptuous. Then he turned to one of the servants and spoke in a sharp rattle of Spanish.

"I know Luiz," Salazar explained. "Fernando will find him."

Presently Fernando returned with the missing Luiz.

"*Cobarde!*" Salazar's voice was a lash.

The man protested in voluble Spanish to which Salazar finally brought an abrupt end by slapping him across the mouth.

The fight had proved disastrous for the outlaws. Twenty captured horses gave evidence of their number. Of these, three had fallen to the Spaniards' fire before Jonathan's premature charge. Five more had been killed by the rescue party and the man shot by Jonathan had been wounded in the shoulder and made prisoner.

"We'd have bagged the whole lot if you hadn't lost your head." Magee turned to Jonathan, his voice severe.

The youth looked at him in astonishment. "Lost my head? They were charging the coach. I heard a woman scream."

Magee's eyes were stormy. "It was agreed you weren't to fire until I gave the order," he retorted. "Had you waited, not a damn one would have escaped." Then he robbed the criticism of some of its sting now with a sudden smile. "But it was a grand charge. You'll make a good fighting man if you ever learn to obey orders."

Magee questioned the prisoner, a saturnine fellow with a cruel mouth. The man refused to answer.

"Let me handle him," Salazar interposed. "I can make him talk."

Magee shook his head. "I could handle him myself if he weren't wounded," he said. "No matter, we'll take him into Natchez and let the authorities there hang him."

The magnificence of the Spaniards' traveling equipment had attracted the attention of all. The coach, especially, was a thing of beauty in spite of its cumbersome size, shaped somewhat like an inverted bell. Jonathan had never seen its like. His curious glances were observed by Don Bernardo.

"But we forget!" Gutierrez exclaimed. "Perhaps Señorita de Lerdo will join us?" The question was directed to Salazar. "I am sure the gentlemen would like to be presented."

Don Miguel rapped smartly. A voice answered from within the coach, there was a rapid interchange of Spanish, then with a slight bow toward Jonathan, Salazar said, "She will join us presently. I am requested to present El Rubio, the gallant gentleman who charged so bravely to her rescue." He seemed amused.

The coach straps creaked uneasily and as the door swung open there emerged, backward and with ponderous effort, a huge woman in black.

"So this," thought Jonathan, "was my lady in distress!" A moment later, however, placing a small footstool in position, she turned expectantly toward the coach, and the youth caught his breath as he glimpsed the girl who peered from the door. At first only her head was visible, a small black beaver hat

perched pertly on golden hair. He was even more entranced as she emerged. Her hair had a lustrous sheen, heavy lashes fringed her wide brown eyes and her skin was tawny. A green cloak, ornamented with black braid, emphasized her coloring.

She was looking at Jonathan, a smile on her full red lips.

"And this is the gentleman who rescued me? Present him, Miguel."

It was obvious that Salazar had forgotten the name. Magee bowed gallantly.

"Mr. Jonty Kirk of Virginia, señorita," he said.

"This is my ward, Señorita Teresa de Lerdo." Salazar completed the introduction.

"La del Pelo de Oro," the fat woman added gutturally. It was as though she had appended a title.

"Jontee—" the girl rolled the word on her tongue—"a very strange name. But nice. I have you to thank, señor, for your gallant charge. Just when we think we are lost—" she shrugged her shoulders daintily toward Salazar—"El Rubio comes to my rescue." She extended her hand toward Jonathan and with quick impulse he bowed, pressing it to his lips. He straightened up in time to glimpse a knowing leer on the face of the fat serving woman.

After a brief council the two parties decided to merge forces for the remainder of the journey. They were forty miles from Natchez. Teresa de Lerdo rode in the coach with her maid Maria. Fernando, one of Salazar's servants, rode postilion, while the obese Luiz, whose cowardice had been exposed by Salazar, stood on the box with José, one of Teresa's servants, a fellow who had a queer trick of cocking his head because of a pair of badly crossed eyes. Don Bernardo had a servant, Pedro, who rode directly behind his master. The last member of their party was Giles Brady, a Kentuckian, whom they had engaged as a guide for the journey.

Natchez was less than twenty miles away when camp was struck that night.

Journey's end now lay only one day away for Jonathan. In his saddlebag was a letter from his father to Colonel Winthrop Sargent. "We were good friends, Jonty," his father had said.

"Now he's been governor of the Mississippi Territory; he'll know better than most the situation there and the value of the land."

Jonathan Kirk, the fourth stalwart son at Redfields, was twenty-one. The stories which drifted up the Trace of the rich plantations at Natchez and of the fertile acres there still in virgin timber, ripe for the taking, had stirred his imagination. And so, accompanied by the negro, Gabe, he had started off, and at Nashville, had joined the party Benjamin Kitchens was organizing to ride down the outlaw-infested Trace. There were six in the group who had joined forces for protection—Kitchens, Jonathan, Johnny Durst, sandy-haired, rawboned youngster from Texas, who was an agent for the well-known trading firm of Barr and Davenport. These, with Kemper and Magee, had made five. The other member of their party was Dan Clampit, the gambler.

Teresa had retired for the night. The men were still awake about their campfire, however. The talk was of Texas. It was Lieutenant Magee's favorite theme. Don Bernardo Gutierrez leaned forward, listening intently.

"There's something about the Texas country that gets into your blood," Magee said, his eyes gleaming. "There's no limit to its space." He brushed tumbled locks back from his forehead. "Someday it will be an empire."

"Empire?" queried Kitchens.

The young officer nodded. "Empire," he repeated. "Rich valleys dotted with farms. Towns surging with people." He added, "Americans, Anglo-Saxon Americans."

"That's very reminiscent of the way Aaron Burr spoke three or four years ago," remarked Benjamin Kitchens.

"Burr had a vision," replied Magee. "Someday it will come true."

"You are right, Lieutenant." Don Bernardo's eyes were two glowing coals of light. "Texas has a great future. And it is nearer than you think."

"Maybe I think it is pretty damn close," Magee retorted.

The two men exchanged glances in which there was more question than challenge. That seemed to end the conversation.

Soon they were all rolled in their blankets and the camp was silent.

Three fires in the darkness. Around one were Jonathan Kirk's party; Don Bernardo Gutierrez and Salazar slept at the second; the servants of both outfits shared the warmth of the third. Between it and the picket line where the horses foraged, sat the prisoner, bound to a small tree. Luiz crouched beside him.

"How much did you say, señor?" he whispered.

"Three hundred dollars—gold. It's in a money belt around my waist."

With fat fingers Luiz found the belt. He felt of the money, smiled. A moment later a knife blade glinted against the prisoner's thongs.

Luiz watched, still gripping his knife until the prisoner melted into the forest. Then he fastened the belt against his body, smiling through lips still bruised from Miguel Salazar's blow earlier that day.

Chapter 2

A Cut of the Cards

JONATHAN WAS astir early, his eyes alert for some sign of movement within the coach. The direction of his gaze had not escaped Maria.

"El Rubio has an eye for beauty, Teté," she remarked with a leer. "He sits with his eyes on our bedroom door."

The knowledge brought a sparkle to the girl's eyes, but she said, "Perhaps it is you, Maria. You are the only one who has shown herself this morning."

"*Por Dios!*" the serving woman lamented. "There is too much of me. I'm afraid he likes them more delicate."

In spite of her bulk, Maria was deft in her service, smoothing a blanket on a low hummock for her mistress's comfort before bustling off to fetch breakfast. It was the opportunity Jonathan had been anticipating. Teresa watched his approach with a chuckle.

"*Buenos dias, señor,*" she responded to his good morning, adding, "You speak Spanish, no?"

"I know only one phrase in Spanish," Jonathan replied. "I think it's beautiful."

"Oh? What is this so beautiful phrase?"

"La del Pelo de Oro."

The lips turned warm and inviting as she moved to make room for him on the blanket.

"Señor Rubio is both brave and gallant." She let her hand fall to the blanket beside her. It seemed a careless gesture. His fingers tingled to the fleeting caress. "I like the Spanish you have learned, Jontee. I hope you will learn to say more."

They were interrupted by the arrival of Miguel Salazar, and Luiz trailing him with a steaming breakfast tray. His bow to Jonathan was stiff.

"I'm so sorry, señor. Had I but known you were here, Luiz could have brought breakfast for three."

There was nothing for the young Virginian to do but yield his place. "I'm going to learn more Spanish," he managed to promise Teresa before he left.

Teresa had a conversation with Maria while the servants were breaking camp.

"What do they say of El Rubio, Maria?"

The servant shrugged her fat shoulders expressively. "The best horses are his, Teté. He rides two a day, and the big black man is his *mozo*. He travels from a far place and—" her smile was a knowing one—"he is brave and handsome, but I have heard nothing else of him."

Teresa bit her lip. "Send José to me," she ordered.

José did not ride in his customary place on the coach that day. Instead he traveled with Gabe, ostensibly to help him with the horses. He was full of questions.

"Señor Jonty is a ver' brave man. Is he as rich as he is brave?"

"Rich?" Gabe registered amazement. "Didn't you know? Why, thar ain't nobody richer'n de Kirks of Virginny. We's from Redfields. Law, I reckon a body could stand on de gall'ry dar an' far as he could see wouldn't be nuthin' but Redfields land. An' a body could ride an' ride widout meetin' no folks but Redfields niggahs."

When the noonday halt was called Jonathan had hoped to renew his conversation with Teresa, but when he rode in Miguel Salazar was seated on the blanket beside her. Teresa's teeth gleamed in a smile as Jonathan came toward them, and even before he stopped she began searching the blanket around her. "My handkerchief, Miguel. Have you seen it?"

Her companion shrugged. "If you've lost it, send for another."

"Thank you, Miguel. Will you get it for me?"

Salazar glanced at her sharply.

"Maria," he called, clapping his hands imperiously for the servant.

"No, she is busy, Miguel."

"If I can be of service, ma'am," Jonathan bowed.

"Of course—" Salazar's voice was mocking—"you would know exactly where to find her handkerchief."

"But I will show him," Teresa smiled. "You are very kind, señor."

As Salazar watched them walk away together his eyes were clouded with anger.

In the pleasant midday sun Teresa had discarded her cloak. As they reached the coach, she leaned against Jonathan almost imperceptibly. It was a fleeting contact, but Jonathan was warmly aware of it. With quick discernment, the girl watched the color burn his temples.

"The little chest, Jontee." Teresa pointed out a brass-bound box in the coach's interior.

Jonathan brought out the box. He didn't notice that the clasp was open. As he lifted it by the lid, the chest fell open, cascading lacy garments upon the turf at their feet. He glanced down with dismay, vaguely recognizing the intimate nature of the filmy apparel. Then with one impulse they both bent swiftly to retrieve the garments, bumped heads, and sat down abruptly upon the grass. With one accord they burst into peals of laughter which rang in the ears of Salazar who watched from a distance.

"How long will you be in Natchez?" Jonathan asked. "I want to see you there."

"And I—" the pressure of her hand was soft—"will look forward to seeing you too, Jontee."

The smile on her lips was a promise. His courage grew.

"Eat with me," he invited. "Gabe will spread a blanket under the trees for us." Then as Teresa hesitated, he continued: "There is so much to learn about you, where you are going, why you are here, and who is Don Miguel? And why should he object to our friendship?"

Her amber eyes widened. "Don Miguel is my guardian. You see I have no family. And in my country, a girl is never alone with a young man, even when they are betrothed. Perhaps that is why Don Miguel is so careful of me."

"What harm can there be in picnicking together?" he urged. "Your guardian can keep his vigilant eye on us—from a distance."

Teresa decided to assert her independence. "Perhaps it will improve Miguel's manners," she thought, as she followed Jonathan across the glade.

The gaiety of their laughter mocked Miguel Salazar. He wandered over to watch Clampit. The gambler sat cross-legged on his blanket, cards fluttering through deft fingers.

"You've been away from New Orleans a long time," was the Spaniard's greeting.

"Your purse should be the better for it, Don Miguel." The gambler did not raise his eyes.

"And now you are going back?" Salazar continued. "Is it safe?"

There was no humor in the gambler's twisted smile. "Memories are short. Particularly," he added, "if the man who has most cause to remember has been buried."

"It wasn't what you did but how you did it. You should have called the fellow out. There's no such stir when a man is killed in a duel."

"I have my own way in these matters," retorted the gambler. "See that lichen on the bark?" He indicated a gray patch on the trunk no larger than a man's head, and his arm moved swiftly. A knife flashed through the air, thumped into the tree in the precise center of the spot he had marked.

"Excellent. Your hand has not lost its cunning," Salazar exclaimed, then added significantly: "There are times I wish I could do that." He paused. "You know whom I have in mind?"

Clampit retrieved his knife. "Yes, I've noticed."

The Spaniard sat down, smiling. He assembled the cards strewn across the blanket. "I'll bet you five hundred dollars on the turn of a card," he offered finally.

Clampit shook his head. "Make it two thousand."

Salazar was thoughtful only for a moment. "I haven't that sum with me. I'll have to give you an order on my New Orleans banker—" he paused—"if you win."

"I know I'll be paid," was the laconic rejoinder.

Miguel tossed the deck across the blanket. "Do you want to shuffle them again?" he asked. "I'm cutting for the queen of hearts."

The cards whispered softly as the gambler fluttered them between his lean fingers only once before handing them back. Miguel cut the deck. "The queen of hearts," he declared before exposing the card he had picked. It was the five of clubs.

He laughed as he arose. "I was just thinking," he explained, "how amusing it would have been if it had turned out to be the queen of hearts."

"Don't forget to leave the order at your banker's," Clampit reminded him as he turned away.

Natchez was only a few hours distant and as they were concluding their meal Kitchens invited the Spaniard and his party to be his guests while there.

"You are very kind." Don Bernardo bowed. "But we already have accepted the invitation of Don Stephen Minor at Concord."

The question of where they were to stay became general. Kitchens invited Jonathan to make Pleasant Hill his home during his visit.

"I would rather not impose on you, sir," the youth replied. "I have a letter to Colonel Sargent. He might take offense if I made any arrangement without first consulting him. For the time being I plan to put up at Connelly's Tavern."

"You'll find that impossible, I'm afraid," Johnny Durst interposed. "That's the residence of Judge Brooks now. You'd better plan to stay at the Kentucky Tavern with Magee and me."

"I'm surprised you haven't heard the story about Connelly's old place," Kitchens observed. "After Connelly's death Judge Samuel Brooks, our first American mayor, bought the place for a residence. The trouble all started because of conditions down Under the Hill. It was getting to be a resort for a pretty rough element, even for a frontier, and Natchez isn't that any longer. The judge had a good deal to say about it publicly.

"There was considerable resentment down Under the Hill and one night a mob marched uptown and stoned Brooks's house. He wasn't at home himself but his wife was, and she was killed by one of the bricks that came through the windows. Well, the judge didn't say anything publicly but when

his friends received notices of the funeral they found a deuce of spades printed on the back as a reminder of what had happened." He glanced at Jonathan. "The deuce of spades, in case you don't know, is the death card. They say there wasn't a word spoken about that deuce of spades but everyone knew its meaning right enough, and from the funeral those men marched in a body down into Natchez Under the Hill. They were wearing pistols under their long coats and when the smoke had cleared away, there were a lot of dead gamblers down there and Under the Hill had been cleaned up.

"Good," said Jonathan impulsively. "The gamblers had it coming to them."

"You think so?" Dan Clampit's voice was challenging.

The young Virginian met the gambler's bleak stare. "Yes," he said, "I think so."

He was in a strange world and unfamiliar with its many codes. He did not see the knife until he caught the gleam of its blade balanced in the gambler's palm. Indeed, most of them present were equally taken by surprise. The flying blade was on its way before Teresa screamed.

But it was Clampit who groaned as the knife flew above their heads in a harmless arc. His wrist was broken. Experienced in border warfare, Kemper had lashed out viciously with his foot, catching the gambler on the wrist just before the deadly blade had been released. Kemper then felled Clampit with a sweep of his powerful fist.

"Murder." His deep voice rumbled angrily. "Cold-blooded murder." Kemper appropriated the knife, the silver-mounted rifle and a pistol which he found in the gambler's saddlebag. "You'll get them back when we reach Natchez," he promised the dazed gambler. "And if I even hear of any knife play in the future, I'll make it my personal business to settle accounts with you."

When Jonathan started out from the Kentucky Tavern the next morning, he did not call on Colonel Sargent to deliver his letter. Instead, arrayed in his best, he explored the town with what patience he could summon while he awaited a reasonable hour to call on Teresa. Then he turned his horse to-

ward Concord and, halting under a spreading tree where he was secure from observation, he dismounted. Here, with the aid of a towel he had stuffed into his saddlebag for just such a purpose, he carefully flicked the dust from his coat and rubbed his shoes vigorously in final preparation for his call.

Concord, originally the home of Spanish governors, was a large manor house surrounded on all four sides by white porticoes. Jonathan had just approached for a better look when the doors were thrown open and, to his surprise, what at first glance appeared to be a cavalcade came trotting smartly right out of the house. As the procession unfolded, however, he discovered it was an outrider followed by a coach and four. He was dressed in yellow satin, and as he passed Jonathan he cried, "Make way, make way for the Yellow Duchess!"

The young Virginian edged back to the border of the drive and watched in amazement as the coach swept past. The coach was yellow with bronze mountings. As the vehicle rolled by he glimpsed its occupant, a woman in her middle years but still beautiful. She was clad in a dress of yellow and on her head was a small turban fringed in gold.

"Make way, make way for the Yellow Duchess!" the groom repeated.

Jonathan stared in new wonder at the house. He had never before seen one with a drive through what normally would be the front door. He caught a glimpse of brick paving before the doors swung shut again. He noted circling stairs leading to the second floor, and after securing his horse to the nearby rail he mounted them, and, with eager anticipation, sounded the heavy knocker.

The black servant to whom he explained his errand invited him into a white paneled hall. The wait was long. Finally there was a footfall. Jonathan leaped to his feet, facing the door, his heart thumping with expectation.

But it wasn't Teresa. Instead the oily Luiz stood there, bowing.

"So sorry, señor." Don Miguel Salazar's servant straightened up. "So sorry, la señorita cannot see you."

Jonathan's heart sank. "You mean it is too early. Did she send a message?"

The servant bowed again. "*Si*, señor. There was a message." He shrugged.

"I am to tell you she is not at home, not today, not any time the señor calls."

Miguel Salazar watched the young man's slow progress down the front steps from behind curtained windows. When Luiz returned he flipped a coin across the room.

Dan Clampit's appraisal of the newcomer had been shrewd. His mulberry coat laced at the cuffs, though faded and neatly mended, still marked him a gentleman. His face matched his coat. Clampit recognized the symbols. Many derelicts journeyed down the Trace in hope of mending their fortunes on a new frontier. Usually there was gold in their belts realized from the sale of their remaining effects.

"A nice day, sir." Clampit's smile, though rare, could be agreeable. "Are you going far or is Natchez your destination?"

"You must be well acquainted around here if you can recognize all the strangers." The man's manner was a trifle guarded. "I'm just looking around at present. As a matter of fact I'm undecided whether to remain here or push on to New Orleans."

"There are great opportunities here." Clampit's usual reserve had thawed into geniality. "If it's land you're looking for perhaps I may be of some assistance."

"I wouldn't want to impose on you, sir." The man was cautious.

The gambler shrugged. "I was just recalling my own experience when I first came," he said. "It would have been a big help had I known someone to show me around. How about a drink, sir? A friendly glass serves as an excellent introduction. I am Dan Clampit."

"And I am Benjamin Marsten. I'd enjoy your company, sir, but—"

"Oh, come, come, Mr. Marsten," the gambler protested. "You won't deprive me of the privilege."

Still Marsten hesitated. "We-ell." He glanced about uneasily. "One slight libation never harmed a man. But only one, mind you. I have—ahem—affairs awaiting my attention."

When Jonathan and Magee together entered the common room of the tavern a little later, they did not observe Dan Clampit and his new friend. The gambler frowned. A word from either of these new arrivals might easily spoil his play. His intended victim was already fuzzy with drink and not apt to leave of his own accord. Feeling secure in this, the gambler slipped quietly from the room. He was confident that the interruption would be brief.

Benjamin Marsten, finding himself alone, peered around for companionship. His watery eyes fell upon the only other table which was occupied. He crossed over, halted before the two young men, achieved a bow of noble proportions.

"*Absit invidia.*" He rolled the phrase over his tongue. "Benjamin Marsten, gentlemen, at your service. It is my indubitable loss that I have not had the honor of your previous acquaintance. I have come to repair this egregious error."

Puzzled, Magee arose, returned the bow and gave his name and Jonathan's. Both of the young men remained standing, uncertain of their visitor's errand.

"Pray be seated, gentlemen." Marsten might have been inviting them to share his own table. "The prospect of congenial company is solace to a weary traveler whose soul is parched for it. Such an auspicious occasion, in fact, should be memorialized suitably, with the flowing bowl. *Dum vivimus, vivamus.* While we live, let us live." Drawing a chair up to the table, he thumped the board peremptorily, to attract the waiter.

The lieutenant glanced at Jonathan, his eyes dancing with amusement. Their visitor's state was no longer a mystery to him. "I regret exceedingly—" his bow matched Marsten's for courtliness—"that I cannot remain and enjoy such company, but I have an engagement. However, I leave you in the best of hands. Mr. Kirk, here, is noted for his conviviality."

Jonathan's black mood was anything but expansive. Nevertheless, as Magee vanished, and the drinks appeared, he discovered a growing interest in this stranger. His magniloquence, so liberally interlarded with Latin phrases, was entertaining. The youth fell to wondering about the author of such bombast and, by what devious path Marsten had arrived at this sorry stage.

"But you aren't drinking, Mr. Kirk," Marsten protested. "Come. My favorite toast: *Dum vivimus, vivamus.*" He drained his glass and rapped for more. "My years are rich with experience—" his voice rolled sonorously—"experience that is at the service of my friends. *Alter ipse amicus.* You grasp my meaning, I trust?"

Jonathan confessed that he didn't.

"A friend is another self," Marsten translated and paused to drain his glass before continuing. "It was your sober condishun that brought forth this remark. An' in my superior experience, I have discovered that money . . . money is the root of all unhappinesh." He fumbled under his coat and, to Jonathan's astonishment, produced a money belt which he dropped upon the table before him. "An' so, my boy, if I can be of any assishtance—" Marsten's head nodded. "Assishtance," he repeated thickly.

The Virginian glanced hastily about the room. Several tables now were occupied. He recognized Clampit, sitting alone.

"This is a pretty pickle," the boy thought. "If I leave him here like this, he'll wake up without any money, as sure as shooting, and I've no idea where he belongs."

In order not to attract undue attention, he slid the money belt from the table into his side pocket. It was bulky, but not very heavy. Jonathan had some difficulty in getting Marsten to his feet, but once started, their progress wasn't too bad. He was hopeful that once out in the fresh air, Marsten would at least partially revive.

Their uncertain course down the street was halted before they had covered fifty yards. An extremely angry but rather pretty girl blocked their path. Hands on hips, brows knit over stormy blue eyes, she watched their erratic approach.

"Well?" Jonathan was uncomfortably conscious of her critical inspection. "I suppose you've no better way to occupy your time than to tempt helpless old men." Her voice dripped scorn. "I suppose it was all very gay and very funny, at his expense. You must feel very proud of your work."

"As a matter of fact, ma'am . . ." Jonathan was staring unhappily into the blue eyes which he discovered were perilously close to tears. "As a matter of fact . . ."

Again he groped for words, as Marsten suddenly tried to straighten up.

"You do him an injustice, Cissy," the older man managed to mumble. "This is my friend. It is my honor to preshent—" here he essayed a bow and would have fallen had not Jonathan caught him—"my daughter Cissy."

"Oh, he's your father!" exclaimed Jonathan.

"Let me have him." Her tone was icy. She took the old man's arm.

"But I want to help you," the youth protested.

"Don't you think you've done enough?" she cried. "Don't touch him. And don't speak to me. Just let us alone." She lashed the words at him in her fury.

Jonathan thought of the money belt, and grabbed at his pocket, where it still bulged, bulkily. He thrust the belt into the girl's hand.

"Your father's," he said. "Don't worry. I won't bother you again."

Chapter 3

The Golden One

Colonel Winthrop Sargent read Jonathan's letter. They were seated in the library at Gloucester.

"And so you've come to have a look at Natchez." The colonel smiled. "Good! We need young men of your background. This is new country and the opportunities are almost unlimited. If I can be of any service, particularly in the selection of land, don't hesitate to call upon me. Of course we shall expect you to be our guest here until such time as you are permanently settled." Hospitably he brushed aside the young man's protest. "I'll send the coach to pick up your things."

It was during his second breakfast at Gloucester that Mrs. Sargent told him of the invitation to the ball at Concord. Don Stephen Minor was entertaining for his distinguished Spanish guests. Jonathan's face fell. Memory of his rebuff was poignantly fresh in his mind. He had sought in many ways to explain it without success. Teresa's loveliness haunted him. The sound of her laughter, the soft touch of her hand, the redness of her lips were memories which persisted in spite of his resentment. He had tried to hope there had been some error, but there could be no mistaking the finality of her message. "I am to tell you she is not at home any time the señor calls."

His hesitation at mention of the ball did not escape the colonel's observation.

"Perhaps Mr. Kirk has another interest," he chuckled. "There's many a pretty face in Natchez. I'd lose my heart a dozen times a day had it not been captured so securely by you, my dear."

"La." Mrs. Sargent glanced at him with mock severity. "It probably isn't your wife that stops you, sir; it's your years." She turned to Jonathan, smiling. "If it is a question of a young

lady," she said, "that will present no difficulties. It will be a large ball and she's probably already invited. If she isn't, I can arrange it for you. Her name shall be included on the guest list."

That same day he saw Teresa. She was with the Yellow Duchess, Don Stephen Minor's wife. The yellow coach caught his eye, halted before the door of Joseph Murray's shop. Mr. Murray, standing bareheaded at the curb, was displaying a bolt of cloth for the great lady's imperious inspection. A small group of idlers dawdled in the spring sun to watch the spectacle. In spite of his efforts to convince himself of indifference, Jonathan felt a twinge of envy when he saw two young men at the opposite door of the coach. He slowed his gait, not wishing to pass the party but still less disposed to change his course on her account.

Teresa, for her part, had observed Jonathan. The young men standing by her side blinked at the spontaneity of her laughter and wondered fleetingly how they had managed to say things so witty. They didn't realize that the laugh had been intended for the ears of a redheaded young Virginian. Teresa was provoked with Jonathan. She had fully expected to find him on her doorstep the first morning in Natchez, and had thought of whimsies which might prolong his suspense. She was not accustomed to neglect and was unaware of the sharp message which had rebuffed his effort to see her. Consequently she was determined upon a course of coolness. The two young men who squired her she found dull, but now she was grateful for their presence and quickened her gaiety.

Jonathan was so engrossed in the scene that he did not notice Cecily Marsten until she was right in front of him. She registered first only as a familiar figure which offered him a way out of his dilemma. He lifted his hat and bowed with a swift smile of recognition before he realized that this was the outspoken girl who had asked him never to bother her again.

"I did you an injustice the other day and I'm sorry." She tumbled the words out swiftly. "Later I realized that you had only been trying to help my father. My first thought was—" she hesitated—"something else."

"Please think nothing of it," he urged.

The laughter from the coach had stopped now and Jonathan stifled the impulse to make sure that the amber eyes were watching him. He hoped so. He wanted them to see that there were other girls who welcomed his company. Then suddenly he recalled the Concord ball and Mrs. Sargent's assurance that she would procure an invitation for any girl in whom he might be interested.

"Our introduction the other evening was rather vague," he said. "I know you are Miss Marsten and I am Jonathan Kirk. Are you planning to attend the ball at Concord tomorrow night?"

The girl's mouth, a trifle too wide for beauty, gave her smile a boyish quality. "No, we are strangers here just passing through."

"Oh, I had the impression you lived here. Wouldn't you like to go?"

She looked at him in surprise. "I'm afraid I don't share your acquaintance with the hostess at Concord," she replied. "Also, I'm afraid our introduction wasn't exactly of a social nature."

"You will receive the invitation," Jonathan promised. "It will be delivered today."

He was interrupted by a hearty thump on the back.

"Jonty," Johnny Durst cried in recognition. "I see you already know Cissy Marsten. You do get around, don't you?"

Jonathan enlisted his aid. "She was just objecting that our first meeting wasn't sufficiently formal," he explained. "Help me out, Johnny."

Durst's expression was quizzical but he complied with grace. "Miss Cecily Marsten, may I have the honor of presenting Mr. Jonathan Kirk of Virginia, better known as Jonty? I don't know how he does it but he always manages to scrape up an acquaintance with the most attractive girls. The last time it was a beautiful Spanish blonde and this time it's you."

Jonathan was quick to press the advantage of Durst's friendship. "Is that introduction sufficiently formal, Miss Marsten?" he queried. "Or must I find someone else to recommend me? I'm still determined that you shall be my partner at the ball."

Cecily hesitated. "You may walk home with me if you like." Her smile was reserved. "You'll have to know where to send

the invitation. If you haven't changed your mind by then, I'd enjoy going to the ball."

The remark had no meaning for Jonathan at the time. But as they walked down into the lower town, through mean and narrow streets, he began to sense her thought. The meanest of the lodgings had been passed; ahead lay only the river. They were almost at water's level now. The yellow Mississippi eddied about the rafts and flatboats moored along its shores. They were of every type. Logs crudely lashed together jostled solidly built arks, some of them boasting cabins.

They came to a halt at one of these, where a rough plank spanned the river's muddy shore, and were greeted by a boy in his teens who smilingly hailed them from its deck. "Hi, Johnny."

"Hello, Cris!"

"This is my brother Crispin." Cecily turned speculative eyes upon Jonathan as she made the introduction. "You've met my father," she added as the old gentleman appeared in the doorway of the cabin.

"Yes, indeed." Jonathan tried to make his voice sound casual. Secretly he was dismayed. His invitation had resulted from a sudden impulse. Now it occurred to him that a girl clad in the poor finery that these humble resources offered would scarcely excite Teresa's concern. But much more disquieting than this was his uneasiness over the false position in which he had placed Cecily Marsten. Her eyes were on him. She was waiting.

His smile was quick. "I'll deliver that invitation this afternoon in person," he promised, and left with more misgivings than were necessary. For Cissy Marsten was a girl of resource. In a chest drawer she found her mother's wedding dress, a filmy thing of white muslin with short sleeves and cut low at the neck. With it were wrapped the slippers of white satin brocade, the ones with the tiny heels which always had fascinated her as a child. The slippers had yellowed to a rich cream that had not marred their beauty. The dress was rumpled but an iron would soon fix that.

Cissy hummed a little tune under her breath as she held it up for inspection.

Teresa de Lerdo sat before the long gilt mirror and smiled at the contours of her figure as Maria brushed her hair. The late afternoon sun flooding through the windows was captured in the burnished tresses. The fat servant smiled. "Oro," she murmured, and then added softly, "La del Pelo de Oro. The Golden One!"

Teresa stretched her slender arms, extending one into the beam of light, admiring its tawny color. Then she stretched a silk-covered leg also into the sunlight.

"My dress must be gorgeous, Maria, to make up for the enchantment it hides." Her eyes reflected approval as they still surveyed the trim ankle. "The wench who invented skirts must have had pipestems for legs."

The old woman made clucking noises. "You want to drive the men mad, little sweetheart? So much loveliness causes even an old woman to blush." Teresa rewarded her servant with a smile. She never tired of such compliments. She drew the silken robe more tightly about her, admiring the way it outlined her figure. Truly, she was delectable, and where was the man who could resist her?

Jonathan Kirk! The pleasure faded from her face.

"What is it, Teté?" Maria was quick to sense her mood. "The young Americano?"

"I haven't seen him since we arrived here."

The servant sighed. "He doesn't deserve his luck but I can arrange it, Teté. It will be very discreet. José can carry a message. . . ."

"I'm no common trollop, to be won so cheaply."

"What is it you want, then, Teté? Luxury you have. Jewels—silks—you take them for granted."

Teresa's words tinkled with mockery. "You know me better than that, Maria. You know I've seen poverty." A boasting note entered her voice. "Silks? I remember their first touch. I've come a long way up and I'll go higher." She shrugged off the robe and stared appraisingly at her body. "I was as naked as this and a man wrapped his cloak about me. When I felt the caress of its lining against my skin, I knew I'd never go back to rags again. I never will, Maria. I never will."

A long way up. . . . With eyes grown moody she stared

into the past she wished it were possible to forget. Gone was the luxury of the room, vanished the silken robe, half-forgotten the servant who brushed her hair. She looked back into the single street of a squalid village in central Mexico; the year was 1796, only sixteen years ago, but it seemed a lifetime. Dust swirled lazily between twin rows of adobe huts as a horde of half-clad children ran shouting down the street.

"La Guera!" shouted the leader and the pack at his heels took up the derisive cry. *"La Guera! La Guera!"* Ahead of the tumult raced a child of nine, her weedy body weaving to dodge the missiles, a sob choked back in her throat. A red welt on one shoulder marked where a stone had struck. Pale, sun-bleached hair streamed raggedly behind her.

"La Guera! La Guera!" The hated cry dinned closer. "The pale one! The pale one!"

Not far away, a brook danced. Here the village women knelt, their laundry swimming whitely in the water. The pale fugitive darted down the bank seeking refuge among these women. A chorus of protest arose from the stream and its angry sound checked the riot. The mob of urchins retreated in search of other sport.

Chica Dominguez patted the tousled yellow head with a tender hand. She was sorry about the child. The wan skin and colorless hair had set her apart always. Ana was Chica's first child. Once, when Chica was young and before toil had thickened her figure, a young Spaniard had come riding up the valley. They both were as young as the season, with the April breeze quick in their veins. Ana was the child of a lush spring breeze. . . .

Four years passed. Ana was older now and taller. She was sitting on a rock warm in the sun and watching the goats, when Pancho came to her. Pancho knew *la Guera* well. She was only three years younger than he. He had thrown rocks at the strange one but that had ended now. He did not think her pretty—she had too long been an object of derision for him to question a verdict so well established—but blood coursed warm in his veins. And she was a girl.

"The sun is pretty on your legs," he said, for want of a better

start. "And the sun is bright in your hair. It shines like the gold Madonna on the church altar."

The tensed girl relaxed. She had never heard anyone talk like this. "Like the gold of the Madonna!" That pleased her. And then Pancho touched her. His voice was tender but his hands were rough and she fought fiercely, angered by her momentary softness. She thought she understood. His tender words had been only a trap to lure her within reach, just as she had so often waited patiently in a covert until an unwary victim passed. She kicked and scratched.

It was only after she realized the difference in her antagonist's attack that his intention dawned upon her. He did not hit back. His thick arms wrapped about her, he shielded his face from her blows and tried to bear her down with his weight. Her fury increased. Her fingers twined in his thick black hair and tugged at it in a frenzy as she felt his weight grow heavy. She fought silently. It did not occur to her to scream. There was no one to hear.

She raked his face furiously, her fingernails tracing red trails in his flesh. Momentarily he relaxed his grip, and as she writhed away her hand fell upon a rock. When he reached for her again she brought it down against his head with all her strength. The blow echoed sharply in the thin air and Pancho grunted. Again his hold loosened and this time she wriggled free, leaving her torn garment clutched in his outstretched hand. Without a backward glance she sped down the mountain.

Ana was not bothered by the loss of her dress until evening. She lay under the trees while the sun was warm. From time to time her wary eyes watched the hill above, but Pancho did not move. She thought of returning for her dress but feared a trap. Perhaps that was his plan, to grab her when she came slipping back for her garment. Ana thought of that because it was the sort of trick she might have planned herself. She was very cunning and patient in those days. The wind lost its friendliness after sunset. She decided to slip back to the village.

Ana saw the campfire from afar and set her course by it. Evening had fallen when she reached the camp, and slipped

cautiously toward the fire. There were four men in the party and one of them wore a velvet cloak. But this was not the reason her eyes grew round and her lips were parted in astonishment. It wasn't the man's cloak that fascinated her, but his hair, which was pale like her own. It amazed her that this should be so. She had come to accept her strange coloring as a deformity peculiar to herself. And, strangest of all, his swarthy companions seemed to find nothing queer in his appearance. He was evidently the master and they the servants.

Don Fernando stared in astonishment at the figure before him. The flames gilded her bare limbs; her hair was almost white. She had the wide eyes of a child but a hint of the beauty to come already was budding in her slight body.

He glanced quickly at his men. Her fair coloring marked her as from his own class. Loosing the chain at his throat, he draped his velvet cloak about her.

She smiled at him, liking the caress of the lining against her skin. Softly she rubbed its smoothness against her, savoring the touch.

"Who are you, child? What are you doing here?" Don Fernando demanded.

"I am Ana," she replied simply, "and I have run away."

"I will take you home," Don Fernando offered.

"I have no home," was her reply. "But I will go with you in search of it, if you like."

In Mexico City Ana became a complication. Don Fernando had grown fond of her. But the maintenance of two establishments was a burden. He had, he felt, set himself too rich a standard when selecting the girl's quarters. Then he had been in the first flush of his ardor and nothing had been too costly. Also the necessity of deceiving his wife palled on him and he found as time went by that he made fewer and fewer excuses for leaving his own fireside. He was not bothered by moral scruples. He knew that such establishments as the secluded little house where Ana awaited him were the rule rather than the exception among men of his class. He simply grudged the necessary expenditure of vigor and money.

Twice a week Ana rode out in a coach. She had no place

to go, no acquaintances at all except Don Fernando and her maid Maria, but she liked to watch the life of the city around her. There was one man she passed frequently, his coach drawn by two splendid black horses. He seemed to know everyone. He was forever bowing, flashing his debonair smile at passing acquaintances. He was aware of her, too, she knew, because she saw him turn his head to stare after her. She began to watch for those black horses, and there came a day when she answered his bow with a smile. Don Fernando had been absent for two weeks.

The next day Maria had bustled into the garden, her black eyes snapping with excitement, a card in her fat paw.

"A gentleman!" There was awe in her whisper. "A gentleman in a carriage. He told me to bring you this."

Ana gazed blankly at the bit of pasteboard. She had never seen a visiting card before and she could not read then. "Who can it be?" she asked. "What does he want of me?"

She had received him there in the garden, still ignorant of his identity and unaware that the door to her future was swinging wide. It was the man who rode behind the black horses.

"Don Miguel Salazar," he introduced himself, bowing.

Don Fernando returned one day after his prolonged absence to find the door locked and the house empty. Even Maria had flown. He was a philosopher about it. After the first surge of chagrin he felt mainly relief. His days of subterfuge and debt were ended.

Maria was lighting the candles. There was no further time for speculation on the years spent with Don Miguel which had changed Ana Dominguez, a wide-eyed child, into exotic Teresa de Lerdo. Measured in time the distance wasn't so great, but to the Golden One the path seemed long and the wild little *la Guera* of Motin very remote.

"You will wear the pale lemon dress, Teté, with the topaz stones that match your eyes?" Maria's voice recalled her to the present.

"Not tonight," she ordered. "I'll wear the turquoise blue. It has more life."

Maria hesitated. "It is considered a bold color in this country,

Teté. And no sleeves. It would startle these people, eh?"

"They'll be startled whatever I wear," her mistress replied shrewdly. "If it's a success, every woman present will want to take it away from me."

"But the men, Teté?" the servant protested. "How about them?"

Teresa laughed. "They will wish the women had their way."

Miguel was waiting when she was ready at last. "Always beautiful," he murmured as he bent to kiss her hand. "You are perfection, my dear."

As she descended the stairs on his arm Teresa was thinking not of Miguel, but of a young man from Virginia with red hair. Her restless eyes were searching the arriving guests and her mind was busy with plans for the evening.

Chapter 4

A Challenge and a Duel

THE NIGHT of the ball Colonel Sargent insisted on lending Jonathan the calash, a handsome closed carriage recently arrived from New Orleans. "We will go in the coach," Mrs. Sargent had assured him. "We want you to make the proper impression on your young lady." True to her promise she had earlier procured him an invitation to the ball addressed to Miss Cecily Marsten. The calash was the first carriage of its kind in Natchez, and Gabe sat proudly on the box, his smile almost as illuminating as the candles in its square brass lamps.

Jonathan set out for the flatboat with gloomy visions. In his foreboding he had even thought of Cecily in an artless dimity frock, overwhelmed by the splendor of the other women and crushed with the realization of it. He was surprised indeed to find her a radiant figure, whose lithe young body was charmingly molded in the soft material of the clinging white dress. Its short sleeves and low neck added to its festive look. Her brown hair was parted in the middle, with curls soft at her temples, and her eyes were dancing.

"Why," thought Jonathan, "we might be back at Redfields and she one of my own cousins come for the holidays!" All his uncertainty fled in that instant, and his pride in Cecily continued to grow after they arrived at the ball. She more than held her own, he thought, with the gay throng that crowded Concord.

Don Stephen Minor and his wife were receiving their guests in the hall. Jonathan and Cecily were just nearing the head of the line when he caught his breath. There was Teresa descending the stairs, beside Don Miguel, her soft lips smiling. Cecily, glancing up, saw her too and noted the perfection of her costume. The entrance had been well timed. There was an in-

stant's lull in the conversation. Jonathan was thankful to be past the receiving line before Teresa arrived there. It might have been awkward. He guided Cecily into the ballroom.

Jonathan watched Teresa guardedly whenever opportunity presented and did not fail to observe her popularity. After her first dance with Don Miguel she was surrounded by admirers. He tried to tell himself he had no interest in her, but he knew better. His resentment was still very real, but her beauty affected him as it had before.

So well did he pretend indifference that it had an effect upon Teresa. At first she was assured. "Give him time," she thought. "He will come to me and then I'll teach him a lesson." But as the evening wore on and still he did not come she grew first impatient and then angry. At last Teresa stopped by his side. He fought back an impulse to turn, and tried to concentrate on his conversation with Cecily. But all the time the windows of his mind were open to this other presence and he found himself straining for the sound of her voice.

Lieutenant Magee, resplendent in his dress uniform, appeared through the crowd in search of Cecily. "Miss Marsten promised me a dance," he said, "and I've come to claim it."

Jonathan watched Cecily move away with Magee. Now someone else approached.

"May I have the honor, Miss de Lerdo?" the new voice asked. "I believe this is our dance."

"But there must be some mistake." Teresa sounded regretful. "Yours is the next dance. I have this one promised to Mr. Jonathan Kirk."

For an incredulous moment Jonathan doubted his own ears.

"No doubt he is looking for me," Teresa continued in a clear voice. "If you see Mr. Kirk, will you tell him I am waiting here?"

There could no longer be doubt. Jonathan turned eagerly, all his anger forgotten.

"Teresa," he said.

She smiled. "So you haven't forgotten me?" she murmured. "I am very angry with you, Jontee. You don't deserve the dance I saved for you."

"I thought it was you who had forgotten," he replied, and

then, remembering, added, "Why did you send me away when I came to call?"

Teresa's eyes widened. "Send you away?" she repeated in surprise. "Who gave you such a message?"

"The servant who hid during the fight with the bandits, you remember. It was he."

"Luiz?" She was beginning to understand. "Come with me," she urged. "There are some things which need explaining."

She took him to the upper gallery. They had the place to themselves. She made no effort to conceal her anger.

"When was this?" she demanded.

"The morning after we arrived here. Luiz said, 'I am to tell you she is not at home any time the señor calls.'"

"And you believed him? Didn't that message seem strange, coming from me?"

"I didn't know what to think," he confessed.

"But Luiz isn't my servant, Jontee. Reflect. Who is his master?"

"Salazar?"

"Don Miguel," she affirmed, and again her voice grew sharp. "We were tricked. Now remember this, Jontee," she continued. "Never accept a message from me unless it is delivered by one of my own servants. Maria you remember. The other is José. You will know him because of his crossed eyes. These two I trust and no others."

"I will always remember, Teresa," he replied. And then because of the pledge implied in her words, because of her perfume which was fragrant about him, because of her nearness and of all the doubts now swept away, he took her in his arms.

"Teresa," he murmured huskily.

"Jontee," she whispered.

He kissed her.

Luiz was assisting with the service at the punch bowl. He was in the drawing room collecting empty glasses on his tray when Teresa and Jonathan walked out the door. His fat face betrayed no expression but his step quickened imperceptibly. This was a scrap of knowledge worthy of reward.

Luiz found his master in the dining room where some of the

gentlemen were enjoying a potion more vigorous than punch. He waited until Don Miguel had finished the story he was telling. During the laughter which followed Salazar glanced at the servant with raised brows. Luiz nodded. Don Miguel excused himself and, once outside, listened attentively to the quick muttering of his lackey.

Absorbed in each other, neither Jonathan nor Teresa heard the soft opening of the door behind them.

Don Miguel seized her by the shoulder, jerking her away so roughly that a pearl brooch at her bodice was torn loose. Almost with the same movement, and before Jonathan realized what was happening, Salazar slapped him across the cheek.

The young Virginian's response was instantaneous. His fist lashed out savagely and cracked against the Spaniard's jaw. It was a short blow but all the power of his body was behind it. It sent Salazar spinning against the railing.

"You see, Teresa," he snarled, "he even fights like a savage. I challenge him to a duel and he uses his fists like a *pelado.*"

Jonathan stepped back. "I'll be glad to meet you, sir," he retorted stiffly. "Any time, any place."

Don Miguel was coldly formal. "Name your seconds. I like my satisfaction to be prompt."

Jonathan thought swiftly. "Lieutenant Magee and Mr. John Durst will act for me. They both can be found at the Kentucky Tavern."

"They may expect a call tonight." And then turning to Teresa, Salazar offered her his arm. "Come, my dear," he said. The words were polite but the tone was mocking.

Don Bernardo Gutierrez and Don Stephen Minor presented themselves the next morning as Salazar's seconds. It was agreed that the meeting should take place at dawn, with pistols as the weapons. It was still dark when Jonathan and his party left the tavern. Durst had hired two boatmen to ferry them across the river to the duelling ground. Magee had found a physician, Dr. Squires, to join them.

The other party had preceded them and was waiting when the boat finally scraped against the sand bar. Had the day dawned clear the first gray mist of morning would already be

in the air. As it was, a thin steady rain was now falling, and they shivered under their wet cloaks in a sooty gloom. The seconds held a brief conference. There was nothing to do but await the light. Then the two parties split into groups again.

Magee didn't like this inaction. Jonathan's impatience had been his concern from the first. Rather than leave the Virginian alone with his thoughts, he walked him briskly up and down.

His talk turned to his favorite subject. There was plenty of time for final instructions later.

"There's something about waiting for morning that reminds me of Texas," he began. "It's a sunny land but it's dark too, dark and waiting for the dawn to come up—a dawn of free men, free ideas and modern civilization in a land still black with oppression. Oh, it may be a red dawn for a time, but liberty and opportunity are worth fighting for. It's a dream I have," he confessed, "this Texas country. Someday it will be as American as Lexington or Yorktown. That day isn't far off, either, and I intend to be there when it comes."

And so they talked until the dawn, sodden and dripping, finally arrived. Only then did Magee revert to the subject of the duel.

"I want you to remember what I've told you, Jonty." His manner was brusque now. "Remember to hold your muzzle down. Remember to hold your breath before you fire. Remember it's the slow squeeze on the trigger that does it."

Jonathan was impatient.

"Let's get on with it," he said.

"Not yet. I can tell you how to win this duel if you'll only listen. Most men are in too big a hurry. They try to shoot first and that's their ruination. It's your weakness too, Jonty. You're too quick on the trigger. Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"I want you to count three after you raise your pistol. Like this: One—two—three."

Jonathan promised.

The rain was a mist upon the river, blotting out the far shore. Gutierrez had drawn a mark in the wet sand. Under the terms arranged, Jonathan and Miguel Salazar were to stand there,

back to back. Gutierrez was to give the word, whereupon each was to advance ten paces, turn and fire at will. The weapons were loaded by the seconds and examined, in turn, before being exchanged. Jonathan and Miguel took their places, back to back.

"Remember, Jonty. Count three," Magee muttered.

As a last gesture, Gutierrez called in a clear voice: "If either gentlemen wishes to offer an honorable amend—"

"No." Salazar's voice had sounded harsh.

"No," Jonathan had replied almost as quickly.

"Are you ready, gentlemen? March!"

Jonathan stepped forward, counting his paces. They had been hurried at first but he caught himself and slowed his gait. He remembered Magee's warning. "Take your time! Count three! You're too quick on the trigger!" The lieutenant was right, he reflected: that had always been his fault. "Eight—nine—ten."

He counted the last steps deliberately. He was already raising his weapon as he turned.

It had been well timed. Salazar was wheeling too. The rain was wet on his pistol barrel as he brought it up slowly.

"Count three, Jonty. Count three slowly." Magee's words seemed to ring in Jonathan's ears. "One," he counted silently, and wondered why Salazar did not shoot. "Two," Jonathan counted again.

And still his opponent did not fire.

Miguel was an experienced duelist. The lessons Magee had tried so hard to impart to Jonathan, he had known and practiced for years.

He liked his adversary to fire first and quickly. Such shots were invariably wild. He had expected this youngster to follow that pattern. Why didn't the boy fire? Miguel drew his careful bead.

"Three!" Jonathan squeezed the trigger.

The two reports came in quick succession. Jonathan was conscious only of amazement as he watched his opponent. Salazar seemed to swing slightly to one side; his face wore an incredulous look as he tottered back a step and then sank slowly onto the wet sand. Gabe was running forward. "Is you

all right, Mist' Jonty? Is you all right?" he was calling anxiously. Jonathan waved him back.

The young Virginian's shot had come first. His bullet went high, drilling through his opponent's shoulder. Salazar was a better marksman. His careful aim had been directed at Jonathan's heart, but the impact of the bullet had twisted him slightly and his shot, though at the right height, had gone a few inches wide, inflicting only a flesh wound in the left arm. In his first preoccupation Jonathan did not feel the hurt, but Magee's sharp eyes saw instantly what had happened.

"I almost gave you bad advice," he said gravely as he inspected the wound. "A fraction of a second later and he'd have had you."

The doctor was kneeling beside the fallen man as they left. "You don't need a sawbones for a scratch like yours." Magee laughed, slapping his friend on the shoulder. "I'll tend to that."

The two companies exchanged the stiff bows that etiquette demanded before parting.

"Shure, that was a nice piece of wor-rk," declared one of the boatmen unexpectedly as they approached the boat. He shook Jonathan's hand. "Now me, Oi'm handier with me fists, and at that Oi'll take a back seat to no man, but Oi know nice shootin' when Oi see it with me own eyes, sor." The warmth of his congratulations added to their light spirits as they embarked for the homeward journey.

The rain stopped, too, although the skies were still leaden and threatening. As they neared town they were objects of some interest. Gentlemen in a rowboat were not a common sight on the river, particularly at this hour of the morning. It was evident that most of the spectators guessed where they had been and why.

This did not bother Jonathan until, close in shore, they were hailed from a flatboat moored there. It was Cecily, leaning over the rail, eying them gravely.

"You're out early," she called.

Johnny Durst, beside her, waved a cheery greeting. Jonathan was thankful for the cloak that hid his wounded arm.

"It couldn't have anything to do with what was worrying you at the ball, could it, Mr. Kirk?" Cecily called.

Jonathan reddened. He wasn't going to lie about it but he'd rather she didn't know. "We just had a little business to see to." He had the uncomfortable feeling that she still was watching when he clambered from the boat a trifle awkwardly.

José's muddy boots traced a path on a polished floor at Concord.

"You saw?" Teresa demanded impatiently.

"Yes, señorita, I saw." The cross-eyed servant nodded. "Only one boat returned. El Rubio sat in it. His arm was bandaged, that is all. He was laughing. Don Miguel I did not see. His boat did not come back. I did not wait longer. I rode away fast, as you ordered."

Teresa let her breath escape in a long sigh. "Wait," she ordered. "I have another errand."

The purpose was clear in her mind when she sat down at the desk, but the note proved surprisingly hard to write. She tore up two attempts and gnawed at the feather of her quill impatiently.

Her final message was brief.

"My dear one," she wrote: "All this night I have waited for news of you and it has been a torment in my heart. I am still waiting. Come to me soon." She signed it, "Your Teresa," and sealed it. "Take it to El Rubio," she commanded. "You'll reach him at the tavern."

The servant recognized her urgency. "I will deliver it quickly," he promised as he hurried away.

Maria dressed her mistress with care; there was no telling how soon the expected visitor might arrive. Finally, carriage wheels crunching on the wet gravel of the drive disturbed this ritual. Teresa was peering from behind her curtains as Miguel was lifted out carefully. Her swift scrutiny missed no detail—the bandages bulky on his shoulder, the sand a muddy crust on the black silk of his stockings. His face was white but his lips moved as she watched. So he was able to talk! She listened and waited.

She could hear scuffling feet in the hall as he was carried into his room but she remained motionless. She was in no mood to face him yet.

Miguel Salazar's wound was not dangerous, though it was uncomfortable and serious enough to incapacitate him for some time. His rage was greater than his hurt. He waited impatiently until the doctor left, then sent for Luiz. He was propped up in bed, his quill scratching busily across a sheet of paper, when the servant entered. He did not look up until the note was finished.

"You are to take this to Dan Clampit, the gambler," he directed. "You will find him in the town Under the Hill. I want it placed in his hands at once. You understand? At once." Salazar's eyes were shrewd. "There will be a reward for promptness, but God help you if you're late."

Luiz was prompt. After Dan Clampit read the message he thrust the paper in the fire and watched until it was consumed.

Chapter 5

Death at the Tavern

WAS MIGUEL'S wound only superficial? Teresa needed to know before Jonathan's arrival. She went to Salazar at last.

"Your anxiety touches me." His voice was mocking. "But set your heart at rest, my dear. I have no intention of dying yet."

"And the young Virginian?" Her voice was carefully controlled.

"Don't tell me you haven't heard!" he jeered. "You give yourself away by waiting so long to inquire. That swivel-eyed José must have brought you the news."

"You've got a bullet in your shoulder. This time you met your match."

He flushed angrily. "I was thinking of other things—my plans for the future. They blinded me. It was like having the sun in my eyes."

"And you were so sure of yourself. The great Miguel Salazar taking time out from his dreams to kill a boy. You thought he was hardly worth the bother, but he had my kisses on his lips and he was young—and attractive."

"You think so?"

"Why else would I be in his arms?"

Fury drained his face of color, accentuating its pock marks. He stared at her, conscious of the widening gulf between them. Suddenly he felt the need of her greater than ever.

"Last night I told you of my dreams," he began.

"I haven't forgotten what you said. Empire! A throne!" She sneered. "Next you'll tell me you've got an army. It doesn't make sense."

"Sit down," he commanded. "The time has come to tell you more. Mexico is seething with rebellion against the king. There's been a great deal of bloodshed and there will be more."

"You've been listening to Don Bernardo," Teresa retorted. "Hidalgo is dead; his army is crushed. Pfa! I thought you were too clever to be taken in by such prattle."

"Let me finish," Miguel interrupted her. "There has been one trouble with all the revolutionists. They fought too much with words, an impractical crew of idealists. What they needed was a leader; someone hardheaded, who would know where and when to strike. Someone whose ambition—" his Latin eyes were blazing now—"was greater than those empty words they spoke. Such a man could be a king in that country now."

"Like you?"

"Like me," he agreed.

"But not now. The revolution is dead," she protested.

"The fire smolders. It only needs fanning to blaze again at the proper moment." He gave his words time to sink in. "I can do it, Teresa. West of us lie the New Philippines, the Texas country, Magee calls it. It has two advantages for my plan. It's beyond the easy reach of royal troops, and its people have the restlessness of pioneers. Let me march an army into the country, spouting the drivel of all revolutionists, and they will join me.

"You ask where I'll get an army? You wonder who is to mouth these empty slogans? I have found the men for it. Bernardo Gutierrez believes these words. They roll easily from his tongue. And his name is known in Texas. They will believe him. He's my revolutionist. He'll inspire my mobs.

"Magee is my soldier. I have listened to him talk. I have watched the light in his eyes when he speaks of Texas. He has a vision in his heart, that man, and he will lead my army. He can raise a nucleus for it before he crosses the border. I will supply him the money. Ah, Teresa, this isn't just talk, this isn't something years away. The time is now. I'm offering you a throne."

Listening, Teresa fell under the spell of his extravagant dreams. She flung herself upon the bed beside him.

"You can do it, Miguel. I know you can do it, darling."

Miguel sent for Gutierrez and Magee as soon as Teresa left. When Don Bernardo arrived, he brought Magee with him.

Salazar extended a hand to Magee, and shrugged off an inquiry as to his wound with a smile.

"Nothing," he said. "Only a scratch. I shall be ready to travel tomorrow, as planned."

"In a week, perhaps," Don Bernardo remonstrated. "With luck. I'm afraid you're making light of your hurt."

"Tomorrow," Salazar insisted. "You forget my coach. With the aid of a few pillows I can have a bed as comfortable as you please. We have business ahead of us, gentlemen. I am impatient to see it begun."

Magee glanced in surprise at Don Bernardo.

The Spaniard explained. "Miguel is in my confidence, Lieutenant. He is aware of our conversations and has heartily endorsed our plans."

"More than that," Salazar declared, smiling warmly. "You two have vision, courage, ability. Don Bernardo's name is well known and popular. The people will rise to his call, and few men could voice a summons with more eloquence. You, Lieutenant, are a soldier. You know how to back up words with force. But where is your army? Who will furnish the funds for it? Rifles and ammunition are required. Cannon are wanted, and wagons to haul the provisions, to say nothing of the stores themselves.

"I have considered these things and I seem to see an opportunity for my own services. You both have many admirable qualities which make me believe in your success. There is one thing you lack, however, which I have." His smile was quick and disarming. "Money! Someone with a purse fat enough to back the adventure and a confidence strong enough to risk it in the cause. I have both, gentlemen."

This came as a new and greater surprise to Magee. He had not revealed his purpose to Salazar. For one thing, such schemes as this did not often find support among men of his class. For another, he lacked confidence in Miguel Salazar.

"What is your interest in our plan, Don Miguel?" Magee asked cautiously.

Salazar showed surprise at the question. "Liberty," he replied briefly. Such was only the beginning of their conversation. From it they progressed to a discussion of details.

It was Magee whose practical mind envisaged the organization of his troops. "There's a ready-made army in the Neutral Ground," he declared briskly. "Skilled and hardened men who fear neither heaven nor hell."

"The Neutral Ground? Where is this place?" Salazar inquired.

"Your country and mine almost went to war over the western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase," the lieutenant explained. "It was avoided by making neutral territory of the disputed area. It's a belt of wild land between Texas and Louisiana. It couldn't be situated better for our purpose."

"And these men? Who are they?"

"Outlaws, ruffians of every description, who have taken refuge there because it's a place beyond the law's reach."

"Bandits!" exclaimed Gutierrez. "I want none of them."

"Outlaws, yes," the officer admitted, "but not a rabble, Don Bernardo. They are the fiercest fighters in the world. Why, with an army of men like that at my back, I could conquer anything." He explained the merciless guerrilla warfare in which he had been engaged ever since he had been graduated from West Point. "That's why I'm stationed at Natchitoches. They'd become so bold we had to take action. We've succeeded in making the border safer, but we've never been able to crush them, and there's a very good reason for it. They're frontiersmen—tough, ruthless and skilled! What a combination!"

"What makes you think they'd follow you?" Salazar asked.

"They will follow a good fighting man anywhere," replied the lieutenant warmly, "given the incentive."

"And the incentive?"

"What does any man want?" Magee asked in reply. "Opportunity. There are plenty there who'd like another chance to live in society. Others—" he smiled—"will come simply for the love of a good fight."

Before they parted, the plan of campaign was perfected. Salazar was to supply Magee with the funds to recruit his army in the Neutral Ground. Gutierrez was to remain in New Orleans, rallying as many men as possible to the cause. The expedition was to be organized at Natchitoches, the last town on the American frontier, bordering the Neutral Ground from

which Magee hoped so much. It had the advantage of being his station. He was to retain his commission in the army until all was in readiness.

Miguel was smiling when he sent Luiz to inform Teresa that they would leave the next morning. Teresa heard his message just as she started down the stairs. Jonathan had arrived.

"Tomorrow?" She showed her surprise. "But Don Miguel cannot travel so soon, Luiz."

"Those are his orders, señorita." Luiz bobbed his head. "He has instructed that a pallet of pillows be prepared in the coach for his comfort. He does himself the honor of riding with you."

This time his bow was more sweeping.

Teresa's steps lagged as she entered the room. There had been important changes since she had penned the note which brought the Virginian hurrying to her. She had had no time to perfect a speech. She was not even sure she was ready to tell him good-by, although Miguel's voice was still in her ears, his confidence in the future he had painted strong within her. Jontee was young.

When Jonathan turned from the window, she was standing there, smiling at him uncertainly.

"Teresa," he said.

"My dear!" Her tone was so soft he scarcely heard it. But what did it matter? The time for words had passed. Swift strides carried him across the room, and she was in his arms. The lips which clung to his were hot. For a delirious interval she laid aside Miguel and his grandeur. Only the moment mattered.

For Jonathan, it was a time equally mad. The murmur of her endearments filled his ears.

"I have always known I would find someone like you," he said. "I knew you were the one, when I first saw you."

For answer, she only nestled closer in his arms.

"And now that I've found you, I'll never let you go again," he continued.

That brought her to her senses. She pushed him gently away. The time had come to tell this boy good-by, and yet she temporized.

"I had to see you before I go," she said, lamely.

"Go? Where?" He was bewildered.

"We are leaving for Texas," she replied. "It is far away, and O my love, my heart is sad at parting from you."

Texas! All Magee's descriptions rushed through his mind. What had Teresa to do with Texas?

"When do you leave?"

"Tomorrow."

"How long will you stay in Texas?" he asked. A resolve began to take shape in his mind.

"For always," she replied. "That will be my home." She held out her arms to him. "Tell me good-by, Jontee."

He kissed her again. "No, not good-by, Teresa," he declared. "Nothing can part us now. I am going to Texas, too."

A smile warmed Magee's face when Jonathan announced that he was going to Texas, and in his turn Jonathan was surprised to learn that Kemper was also Texas-bound. The talk was of gunpowder, artillery and volunteers.

"The Spaniards won't let any more American colonists cross their border," Magee explained. "They don't like our way of doing things. But we're going, and we're going in force. We'll be so strong they can't stop us, and we'll take our own government with us. Do you understand, Jonty?"

"I understand," Jonathan said. "I'll go with you."

Plans for the immediate future were explained. Magee was leaving the next day for New Orleans, to complete final arrangements for the expedition. There were ammunition and supplies to be procured.

"Kemper is going by boat," Magee continued. "He's helping me organize the army and will be second in command. Why don't you go with him? He can use a dependable man. And you can travel in the same boat with your friends the Marstens."

"You mean we're taking a girl along when there's fighting to do?"

"She'll be safe enough." Magee was impatient. "You can't build a nation without homes. Of course, we'll leave them in Natchitoches until the country's safely won."

The officer paused in his restless striding about the room to frown at his watch.

"I have an appointment," he said. "As it concerns your trip, why don't you both come along?"

Magee took him to the Marsten boat, where they found arrangements already in progress for the journey. Johnny Durst was there, and a boatman idled against the rail, listening to a lumberman who was deep in argument with the three Marstens.

Jonathan was surprised to find that the boat was being sold; he had concluded that this was the craft in which they would journey to Natchitoches. Johnny Durst explained why it was impossible. This was a typical Mississippi river boat, about forty feet long and fifteen feet wide, and for a voyage up the Red River, which was the way their route now lay, such a craft was too cumbersome. Pole boats were used. While Durst was explaining this, the Marstens reached an agreement on the sale.

It was evident that Cecily, rather than her father, had driven the bargain.

"I will lose money on it." The lumberman's shrewd gaze scrutinized the sturdy planking. "When will you be ready to turn it over to me?"

"That depends on Mr. O'Rourke." Cecily turned to the chunky, wide-beamed figure which lounged against the railing.

Glancing at him directly for the first time, Jonathan was surprised to discover the loquacious boatman who had helped ferry him to the dueling ground.

The recognition was mutual. "Shure, it's Misther Shoot-Em-Down Kirk," the Irishman trumpeted, ignoring Cecily's question. "Oi'm hopin' you'll be afther takin' this trip with us, Mr. Kirk. Oi'll be more aisy in me mind with a good fightin' man along when we hit the Indian country."

Jonathan flushed at this allusion to the duel.

"Mr. Shoot-Em-Down Kirk," he heard Cecily echo with cool detachment. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mr. O'Rourke. Mr. Kirk has just come to tell us good-by."

Magee explained Jonathan's intention of joining the party.

"His servant Gabe will come too," he added. "That makes two more hands."

"Shure, it's a crew Oi'm needin'," declared the boatman. "If he can't use a pole, that big black man of his can."

"We need men, Mr. Kirk." When Cecily spoke her tone was impersonal.

"That's settled, then," declared Magee, and Jonathan said nothing.

Cecily's invitation, he noted, had been reluctant.

Magee had purchased a pole boat from O'Rourke. Normally, a crew of eight men was required to propel such a craft upstream. However, there were few boatmen headed for Natchitoches, and O'Rourke had so far recruited only one to help him on the journey. This was Giles Brady, the lank, bearded woodsman in buckskins who had guided the Gutierrez party down the Trace. O'Rourke, Brady, Ben and Cris Marsten, Johnny Durst, Samuel Kemper, Jonathan and Gabe would comprise the rest of a makeshift crew.

It was arranged that their journey should start the following dawn. For Jonathan, it was a busy afternoon, filled with final preparations and duties, including farewells at Gloucester and these were not easy.

The Sargents had been hospitable.

Because of the early hour set for their start, he decided to sleep at the Kentucky Tavern. He asked for the room he had occupied before because it was convenient to Gabe's quarters in the annex at the rear.

The Negro followed him up with the luggage and remained while Jonathan went in search of Magee. The Marstens had invited them to supper aboard the boat.

Salazar's note had reminded Dan Clampit of a wager made back on the Trace. The Spaniard was growing impatient. From the gallery the gambler identified the voice he wanted to hear, and marked the room well. It was the third window from the corner. Furtively he slipped down the rear stairs and waited until the last guest had left the common room and the final candle had been snuffed out. Then backstairs creaked again beneath Dan Clampit's weight. After he gained the second floor, he moved catlike, to the third window. It was half open

and he could hear the cadenced breathing of a sleeping man He smiled.

This was the room. With supple fingers he eased the casement wider, inch by inch.

The knife was wet when he thrust it back into the scabbard under his arm. Then he slipped out as he had come, a wraith fading quickly into the night.

A stranger had ridden into Natchez late in the evening, heading up the Trace. Magee had just sent Gabe to the boat with his master's luggage, and the stranger was assigned to the vacant room. The next morning his body was discovered, stabbed three times. His assailant had escaped through the gallery window. Robbery wasn't the motive. His money belt was untouched. No one ever learned his name. Natchez Under the Hill seethed briefly with the mystery and then forgot it. There was no trace of the murderer.

Chapter 6

Show-Down at Crow's Nest

JONATHAN REGRETTED his decision to travel by water many times before the voyage ended. For two days they had lazy drifting, reaching Fort Adams at the mouth of the Red River the second night.

"Here's where our wor-rk begins," O'Rourke promised.

For most of them poling was a new and toilsome experience. The journey was not all toil, however. It was new and interesting country to them. Only Jess Leeman, a bear-scarred latecomer, bound for Natchitoches, who had joined the party at the last moment, had made the trip before. They passed the mouth of the Black River on the third day, and they had passed only one white settlement, Avoyelles, a few days later. At Rapides they stopped. This prosperous settlement seemed almost like a city after twelve days in wilderness.

The portage around the falls was hard, wet work. There were two of them, about three-quarters of a mile apart; both impassable in the boat. But the trip had its agreeable incidents, too. One of these was their stop at a prosperous Indian village, the third night after leaving Rapides. It was the home of Appalaches who had migrated from Georgia some years before, bringing with them a higher civilization than that of neighboring tribes. All about the village were cultivated fields. The dwellings were of logs. Astonishingly, they had milk to drink here and were able to purchase cured pork.

This hospitality did not prepare them for their adventure among the Pasquegoulas, whose town was spread along both banks of the river. They reached it the following night and camped above it where two branches of the stream forked.

Almost immediately visitors began to arrive, sitting about them in such numbers that it delayed their camp preparations.

Four members of their party appeared to excite particular curiosity: Jess Leeman because of his scarred face, Kemper because of his great bulk, Jonathan because of his red hair, and Cecily because she was a woman and young. The chief, Milchilotan, displayed particular interest in her, though his expression never changed. When he stalked back to the village he sent a messenger to announce that he was preparing a feast for the guests.

"I'm glad to hear that," Kemper confessed. "I was a little worried. This is supposed to be a civilized tribe, yet I haven't liked the feel of things. Now I feel better. They surely wouldn't give us a feast if anything was wrong."

All the same, they took their weapons with them. The chief's lodge was a cabin of peeled logs, with a fire burning in the center of the earthen floor, the smoke escaping through a hole in the bark roof. It had no windows and only the one door. The air was thick with haze, and the food, by white standards, was greasy and poorly cooked, but the novelty of the experience outweighed its drawbacks, even for Cecily. At length Milchilotan wiped his fingers upon his leggings and lighted the ceremonial pipe. It was passed solemnly from hand to hand.

"Now for the speeches," Kemper grumbled in Jonathan's ear.

But they heard no speeches.

"Get the woman out of here!" someone shouted. "Get her away. Help! Help!" The final word was cut off abruptly.

"I heard a white man's voice," replied Kemper, his voice mild.

Milchilotan shook his head. "You listen to the chatter of a squaw."

Kemper smiled as if satisfied. "It is late and we have far to travel," he said, rising. "The feast has been good and we are sorry to leave our Pasquegoula friends."

Milchilotan never moved, but several Indians stood in the doorway, blocking their exit. "It is many days' travel to Natchitoches in your heavy canoe," the chief replied. "I will trade you many horses to make the journey easy."

"I must discuss this," Kemper replied. Turning to Jonathan, he spoke guardedly. "I don't know what he's got up his sleeve.

Stick close to Cecily." He advanced toward the chief. "You speak of trades. What is it you want, Milchilotan?"

"The squaw," the chief replied.

Kemper seemed unperturbed. "She belongs to another," he smiled. "Such a trade is impossible."

"Then I will trade him the horses," the chief persisted. "Milchilotan will be your friend. You can go in peace after you give me the squaw."

Disarmed by Kemper's manner, the seated chief was utterly unprepared when two huge paws gripped him by the throat and swung him clear of the floor.

"Now!" Kemper's hoarse shout filled the room. "Keep together and follow me."

The Indian seated at Cecily's side made a grab for her. Jonathan's kick caught him in the jaw and sent him spinning. "Hang on to my coattails, Cissy," he ordered. He grasped her by the arm and lifted her to her feet.

Brady and Leeman, both experienced fighters, were preceding Kemper toward the door. Each held a drawn knife. The Indians who blocked the doorway hesitated, eying their helpless chief. The whites were in a compact body now, grouped about Cecily. Jonathan, screened by those in front, hurriedly reprimed his rifle. He lifted his weapon, aiming at the man nearest the door.

"No one leaves this lodge," he called. "I'll shoot the first one who moves toward the door." A path was opened for them.

"Good work, Jonty, keep 'em covered," Kemper said. "Brady and Leeman will go first. If the squaws who cooked the meal are still outside, shoo 'em in here. The rest of you get those rifles primed."

Half a dozen Indian women were swiftly brought in. Kemper never relaxed his grip on the chief. Now he turned to the Indians waiting at bay against the wall.

"Milchilotan goes with us," he said. "Attack, and he will be the first to die." He addressed his own party. "All right, let's go," he ordered. "Brady and Leeman first again, to guard against surprise outside. Then you—" he nodded at Ben Marsten—"and your daughter. I'll bring the chief. Jonty and Durst will come last. They'll cover us with their rifles."

Under Kemper's instructions Gabe closed the door behind them and O'Rourke propped a log against it. Giles Brady turned to the prisoner.

"Where's that white man?" he demanded. "The one we heard yelling?"

Milchilotan said nothing.

Jess Leeman pressed his knife against the Indian's bare chest menacingly. "I'll make him talk," he promised.

The savage hesitated for a moment and then pointed to the near-by cabin. A white man was there, bound and gagged.

"Merci, m'sieur," said the new addition to their party. "I theenk we better move from here queeck, eh? Most of the braves, they are out hunting the buffalo, but they will come back." He surveyed with approval the armful of Indian weapons that Marsten was carrying. "Maybe she's not such a bad feex after all, eh?"

Kemper organized their retreat. Boldness was their best course, and it had the advantage of speed. The cabins were scattered. Anyone who saw them leave must believe they were leaving the council lodge as friends. If the young braves actually were away on a hunt, they had to contend only with squaws.

They kept closely bunched, Milchilotan in their center, a knife against his ribs. On the outskirts of the village Kemper waited with Brady and Leeman to hold off pursuit while the rest broke camp. They packed hastily. Milchilotan, securely bound now, was placed in the boat. They were not yet ready to give up their hostage.

Étienne Vauban, the prisoner they had rescued, was a weazened and voluble French trapper, who fortunately was thoroughly familiar with the country. The river forked here. The stream to the right Vauban called *La Rivière de Petits Bons Dieux*, and explained that log jams blocked its passage. To the left stretched the Cane River and that way lay Natchitoches. They feared pursuit, particularly in view of their boat's slow progress. Vauban knew the trail which paralleled the river for some miles, and volunteered to guide a rear guard there. "But I theenk she is safe," he shrugged, pointing at the captured Indian weapons. "Besides, thees are not bad men here,

m'sieurs. Tonight they are ongry. Thees theengs happen sometimes. It weel not last."

Giles Brady and Jess Leeman were assigned to accompany Vauban up the trail. They were to meet at a point where a large cottonwood was uprooted across the stream. The little Frenchman identified the meeting place carefully. Then the boat headed up the Cane River by starlight.

It was not until they had reached Little River that the captive chief was released.

For three days they journeyed up the Cane River, so called because of the sugar cane which grew along its banks. In reality this was just a branch of Red River, Étienne told them, uniting with the other fork some sixty miles beyond. At the next fork they swung to the right on Little River. As before, both were actually beds of the same stream, and they united again just below Natchitoches.

Great white houses, facing the river on both banks, were their first intimation that they had reached their goal.

"Natchitoches, she ees there," Étienne pointed.

They had to climb the grassy slope to see the town proper, two hundred yards back from the stream, its buildings grouped about the hundred-year-old trading post which the trapper pointed out. He showed them the new American fort, too, beyond the town, where the low wooded hills began.

Their journey had required one day less than four weeks and Magee, covering a greater distance by horse, had already arrived. He had rented an adobe cottage for the Marstens, and had engaged rooms at the tavern for Kemper and Jonathan. The bustling town was overflowing its capacity. In addition to the Spaniards exiled here since the failure of the Hidalgo Revolution, the nucleus of Magee's army was beginning to gather. Gutierrez had rented the imposing residence of Theophile Tauzin; this was the town house of a French family of noble extraction, which had aided materially in financing the republican cause. No secret was made of the plans for the expedition. Salazar had shipped Gutierrez a printing press, and it was busy with the publication of Don Bernardo's manifestoes. He had just printed one entitled "The Brotherhood of Man."

"Riders slip across the border with these broadsides almost every day," Magee explained. "We're sowing our seed in the Texas country. They'll be ready for us when we arrive."

Magee was still on duty, often away with his troops in pursuit of Neutral Ground outlaws. His resignation from the regular army had not yet taken effect. When in town, however, he was feverishly active holding conferences with Don Bernardo and the group of leaders he had assembled for his expedition. Gutierrez, because of the influence of his name, was nominally its head; but Magee was to be the actual military chieftain with the title of colonel, and Kemper, with the rank of major, was to be second in command. There were other men experienced in frontier fighting: Fisher, Lockett, Perry, Ross and Despallier, the Frenchman. Fisher was Magee's adjutant; Lockett, Perry and Ross were captains.

Jonathan's days were busy. Upon Kemper's recommendation he had been made a lieutenant of scouts.

"But I'm afraid I don't know much about scouting, sir," he had protested.

"You'll learn fast enough," his friend had replied. "I'll give you experienced woodsmen."

So far there were only two men in the company, but true to his word, Kemper had picked good ones. They were Giles Brady, and Étienne Vauban.

The young Virginian fell into the habit of dropping in at the Marsten cottage in the evening. It was a second home to him. He was not the only habitué. It had become the meeting place for the party which had journeyed up the river together. Only Jess Leeman was missing. They didn't see his scarred face after they reached Natchitoches.

Magee dropped in one night with Kemper. He had use for Jonathan and his scouts.

"Can you take me to the Crow's Nest?" he asked Étienne.

Vauban shrugged. "I have been there often, m'sieur. I can guide you, but bringing you back ees another theeng. You have fought thees men too long."

The Crow's Nest was a village hidden in the forests of the Neutral Ground. "This time I would go as a friend," Magee explained. "I want to talk to them. It's the Spaniards I'm plan-

ning to fight now and I want them to go with me."

It was finally arranged that Étienne should go first and explain their mission. Magee would follow with Jonathan and Giles. Étienne didn't like it. "You weel not come back alive, m'sieur," he promised. "Thees men have reason to hate you, and they are more savage than the Indians."

"It's a chance I'll have to take," the lieutenant admitted. "Perhaps I should go alone though." He turned to Jonathan. "I'm not ordering you to stick your neck into a trap."

The young Virginian insisted on going, however, and Giles too. Étienne was to go on ahead. The others started before dawn the following morning, Giles in the lead, for he already had learned most of these trails. They followed a path through the forest for two hours before Giles reined in his horse.

"We'll leave the critters hyar," he said. "This is whar Étienne reckoned to jine us."

They found the trapper's horse tethered in a thicket when they led their own animals there for concealment. The Frenchman joined them while they were busy at this task.

"They weel hear you, m'sieur," he said. "That much they have promise'. After that, *voilà!* Who can tell?"

About an hour later, Étienne halted them at the border of a large clearing while he stepped into the open and whistled to make his presence known. He was answered by a hail and, turning, beckoned to his companions. A dozen log cabins were grouped in the clearing where probably fifty men lounged. Word of Magee's coming had spread. The meeting was held outdoors, the outlaws perched on stumps or seated on the ground, listening attentively.

It was the same theme Jonathan had heard his friend discuss so often, the Texas country and its promise. Magee's eyes were two dancing flames as he spoke. He stressed the battles to be fought, for these men were fighters, and he told of the opportunities in the new land. Each volunteer was to receive a league of land and forty dollars gold when the campaign was won. They would receive their supplies and wages of four dollars a month. Jonathan watched the audience intently. Their grim faces were expressionless.

"Mighty purty words," one of them finally spoke. Watching

him, Jonathan was surprised to find the face familiar, although at the moment he could not remember where he had seen it. "Mighty purty," the man repeated. "But I didn't come hyar to listen to speakin'. I come 'cause I heered Magee was comin' and I had a score to settle with him." He pointed a bony finger at the lieutenant. "Thar he stands. The man that's been huntin' us down. We've got him whar we want him. That's why I come."

Jonathan tightened his grip on his rifle. He recognized the speaker now. This was the outlaw who had been captured in the battle along the Trace.

"Take it easy, Tom. He came hyar as a friend this time, and I liked his talk." Jonathan knew that voice. He could scarcely conceal his surprise as he glanced across the clearing into the scarred face of Jess Leeman. "We've been on diff'rent sides of the fence," Jess continued, "but I know a fightin' man when I see one. Me, I'd welcome a chance to take a crack at the Spaniards. I'm int'rested in this idee." He turned to Magee. "I reckon we'll have to figger this out amongst ourselves," he said. "We'll git word to you what we decide. You can go."

No word came from the Neutral Ground for three days.

Jonathan was at the Marsten cottage on the third night when Étienne called him to the door. "There ees a frien' here to see you, m'sieur," he explained, his manner mysterious. "A ver' good frien'."

Jess Leeman was waiting outside.

"We're comin' to Texas with you," he said. "Of course thar's some that won't an' some that will. Tell Magee. Most of 'em hate his guts. But they sure admire the way he fights."

"He likes the way they fight, too," Jonathan assured him.

One hundred and eight outlaws from the Neutral Ground came in to join the army. Magee camped them west of the fort, and divided them up among the three companies of Lockett, Perry and Ross. Jonathan's little company of scouts grew also.

"I want you to grant me a favor, Jonty," Cecily said on one of the rare occasions when they were alone. "Take Father and Cris in your company with you," she urged. "Cris is just a boy still, only sixteen, and Father—" she hesitated, "Father isn't

the man he used to be, Jonty. He's really more of a child than Cris now, in some ways."

"But why should they go at all, Cissy? It's a long, hard way to San Antonio."

"We've come here for a new start," she replied. "You understand that. Texas is a land of opportunity for us, just as it is for all these others who are going. Cris and Father have to go. They must do their full part. I don't want it any other way, Jonty, but it worries me, too. You see, I'm the one who was determined to come here. It was my doing. By every right I should be the one to go."

"But you're a girl," Jonathan pointed out.

"And so I can't go myself." Her tone was rebellious. "I have to send others in my place."

Ben Marsten might easily become a liability in such a company as his. The thought troubled Jonathan, but there was no hint of this in his smile.

"All right, Cissy," he promised. "I'll look after them." Later, Denis O'Rourke also insisted on joining the company.

Jess Leeman had not come in with the other outlaws. Instead he appeared at the Marsten's door one evening, looking for Jonathan.

"I'd sort of like to travel with my friends—" he indicated the others with a nod—"if you'll take me."

Jonathan shook his hand. "I need men like you, Jess."

"I've got me a pardner," the outlaw explained. "We'll have to stick together. He's hard as oak pegs. But you won't find a likelier hand at scoutin' or fightin'."

"Bring him along," was the hearty reply.

Jonathan regretted this last invitation when he met Leeman's friend. It was Tom Sartin, the outlaw who had wanted to shoot Magee at the Crow's Nest. But he seemed to carry no grudges. He was a solitary figure, seldom entering into the companionable talk of the others. On the other hand, he was most skilled in frontier craft, a valuable man for the work ahead.

That completed the group. More and more they were in the saddle. None of them knew the date set for crossing the frontier, but a train of ten supply wagons had arrived from New Orleans, together with three six-pounders. The little force now

numbered about one hundred and fifty men, and they were getting restless. Everything seemed ready to move, but Magee, who had resigned from the American Army, was anxious for the arrival of re-enforcements from New Orleans. He had hoped for a much stronger expedition.

For a week Kirk's Scouts, as they now were called, had been across the frontier on reconnaissance. On their way home they found Magee's troops camped on the Neutral Ground, on the east bank of the Sabine River, ready and waiting to move. Kemper was in command there. Gutierrez and Magee were holding a conference in Natchitoches.

"You'd best report to the colonel in person," Kemper advised. Jonathan took his company with him. It probably would be their last meeting at the Marsten cottage before the campaign started and they all looked forward to it. Once in the town, he rode off in search of his commander, promising to join the others later.

He was headed for the Tauzin house when he saw the baroque golden coach. For a moment, Jonathan thought he must be back in Natchez, and this the Yellow Duchess riding out from Concord. On this frontier, the sight was fantastic. He reined in, amused by the grotesque splendor. Astride his horse, he sat too high to look into the carriage and could not see its occupant.

Suddenly he recognized the footman at the rear. Those crossed eyes were unmistakable. It was José. That could mean but one thing. Jonathan wheeled his horse and spurred into a gallop after the hurrying coach.

Chapter 7

First Blood

THE COACH had turned from the town into the road skirting the river.

"Teresa!" someone called. "Teresa!" A horseman was galloping beside her window.

She leaned forward to peer up at him.

It was Jonathan!

For one giddy instant she thought it a delusion.

Then he called again, shouting her name, and she knew it was really he. She was laughing madly when finally he succeeded in halting the postilions. She did not stop until he opened the door and took her in his arms. Her fingers stroked his face as he kissed her.

"They told me you were dead," she said finally. "I thought I'd never feel your lips again," she murmured, clinging to him.

He had not realized the actual meaning of her words in his first joy. Now he held her at arm's length, frowning.

"Who told you I was dead?"

"I heard it in New Orleans," she faltered.

"From Salazar?" he demanded.

She shook her head. "A traveler from Natchez brought the message. A man was murdered there and he said it was you." She threw her arms about him again. "Don't let us speak of it again, Jontee. I do not wish to think of my unhappiness, now that you are safe."

For the first time they became conscious of the waiting postilions and grooms, spectators of their fervent embrace.

"José," Teresa called.

The groom scrambled from his perch and took the reins of Jonathan's horse at her command.

"They have seen too much," she said, pulling him gently

toward the coach, and laughed softly as she watched the flush creep into his temples. He was remembering the ardor of those public caresses. She liked that. He was going to be delightful, this Jontee.

Jonathan told her of Magee and his army—quite familiar to her—and of his part in the enterprise, which was news.

"It is because of you that I came, Teresa," he concluded. "No matter where you go, I will follow you."

"And no matter where I am, I shall want you beside me."

When the time came for them to part, he explained that he was headed for the Tauzin house to find Magee.

"But he is at the tavern," Teresa protested. "You will find him there." Miguel Salazar was waiting at the Tauzin house, and she did not want these two to meet again. Not yet.

He turned back, with her kisses still hot on his lips, her promise still soft in his ears. "I will see you soon, my love—in Texas."

Magee eventually returned to the inn and restlessly paced the room as Jonathan reported.

"I'm tied up here, Jonty," he said. "I don't like this damn waiting. The summer's slipping by. I wanted to move in June and here it's the ninth of August. That's the only trouble with these Spaniards I'm working with. Time means nothing to them."

He explained that more men and supplies were on their way. "I don't dare leave anyone else to forward them. They might never arrive." He sat down at the table and frowned at a blank sheet of paper. "I'm ordering Gutierrez to move on to Nacogdoches. Kemper will be in real command of the army till I get there. I want no misunderstanding about that so I'm sending written orders. Are you ready to ride?"

Jonathan explained that his men were waiting at the Marsten cottage. "Good." Magee already was scribbling his command. "Pick them up and start at once. Kemper will need every man."

Kirk's Scouts crossed the Sabine ahead of the army on August eleventh. "Keep your eyes open and your mind calm,

Jonty," was Kemper's final admonition. "Remember, it's information I want from you. Never lose sight of that. Keep me informed and let me fight the battles."

Except for Cecily waiting in Natchitoches, Durst in Nacogdoches, and Kemper back with the main force, Jonathan's little company was the same group that had been together for so long. Only Tom Sartin had been added. They were not a military formation, but a group of tried friends, riding out into the dawn.

Étienne Vauban, familiar with the trail, led the way, Giles Brady at his side. Attoyac, a huddle of houses called a village by courtesy, was their first destination. They reached it before dawn.

Gabe was left to guard the horses while the others crept forward in pairs from each direction. Cris Marsten was with Jonathan. They first reached a stake corral, where they could hear animals moving restively. The creatures had caught their scent. Peering in, they saw it was filled with horses. One of them nickered.

"We've struck a Spanish patrol," Jonathan whispered. "It's up to us to cut them off from their horses. Keep with me, Cris."

Crouching in the shadow of the corral, they worked their way swiftly around it, heading for the gate on the opposite side. They had covered half their path when the alarm was given. The approach had been so quiet that the sentry on duty had heard nothing until then. Now he fired, and there were three quick echoes to the shattering sound. Three sure bullets cut him down. The Spaniards had no chance to defend themselves. The momentary confusion centered about the corral gate, where several tried to get to the horses and escape. Jonathan and Cris reached it at the same instant, swinging right and left with their rifle butts, driving the enemy back. Only one man got away. How he reached his horse they never learned, probably by clambering into the corral at another point. The swift tattoo of hoofs as he broke from the gate was their first warning. Cris made a futile grab at the speeding animal. Jonathan fired after him hastily, but the target was shadowy. He missed. The rest of the Spaniards—there were

eighteen of them—surrendered. None of the scouts had received a scratch.

"That was plumb easy." Jess Leeman grinned. "Étienne must have had a wife thar at Attoyac, too. He knowed the place so well."

Even the weazened trapper joined in their strident laughter.

"Just the same, I wish that fellow hadn't escaped," Jonathan complained. The enemy would be warned now.

Their route lay north of San Augustine, where a small settlement had sprung up around the old Spanish mission. The rancheros there were predominantly American and favorable to their cause, but Kemper wanted no messenger bearing tales of his strength back to the Spanish commander. Nacogdoches was their goal—the strongest point in East Texas. Here Magee hoped to concentrate his force, adding to its strength, before moving on San Antonio de Bexar, the capital.

Salitre Prairie lay before them, a long day's ride to Nacogdoches. It was nearly noon of the following day when Étienne came hurrying back with news that he had sighted a Spanish force ahead, eighty strong and riding toward them.

"This is what comes of letting that man escape," declared Jonathan. But he was encouraged by their numbers. It was a strong party but totally inadequate for the army which was not far behind him.

Cris was sent galloping with a message for Kemper. This left only six in Jonathan's company. They fell back into the shelter of wooded hills.

The Spaniards were advancing at a brisk trot, apparently confident of their strength, when they topped the crest of a hill and saw—not more than two hundred yards away—the first of Kemper's men approaching from the opposite direction. Captain Perry's company, about fifty strong and the only one fully mounted, was galloping to reinforce Kirk's Scouts. Spaniards and Americans pulled up in equal surprise.

Jonathan, off in the trees to the right and between the two forces, had foreseen the situation and sent Gabe to warn Perry, but the time was too short. The Negro was just riding up with the message when the Spaniards trotted over the hill.

The rest of Jonathan's little force had dismounted. The time

for concealment had passed, though their presence still was unknown. "Every man draw a bead," ordered the Virginian, "and let them have it."

Their rifles spat angrily from the forest's rim. The range was long. But these four men of his had lived by the rifle—Giles Brady, the Kentucky woodsman; Étienne, the trapper; and the two outlaws from the Neutral Ground, Leeman and Sartin. Two of the enemy swayed from their saddles. A couple of horses went down. Jonathan knew that if anyone missed it was he.

The little volley signaled Perry's company into action. Without waiting for a command, they let out a yell as they pressed their horses forward, firing raggedly as they rode.

The flanking volley caught the Spaniards by surprise. They fired only half a dozen hasty shots before they fled in panic. They left two dead upon the field. Seven others were captured. Their colonel, Montero, escaped.

Kemper halted the army at Quirk's ranch that night. Captain Lockett's company was thrown forward to reconnoiter the appoaches to the town. Jonathan Kirk's Scouts, now rejoined by their missing comrades, were ordered to circle Nacogdoches and intercept any messengers trying to leave by the King's Highway to the west.

Jonathan pushed his little band hard, but their horses were jaded and most of their path led through forests where the going was necessarily slow. Their start had been late and it was long after dark before they cut across the road which led to San Antonio de Bexar. They bivouacked there, with outposts thrown out east and west, but they had their trouble for nothing. Colonel Montero and his few regulars had fled that way hours before.

A large force moved east from Nacogdoches the following morning. Lockett's scouts warned Kemper of its strength—more than three hundred men—and he fortified the crest of a hill near Quirk's. He was determined to give no ground. The success of the entire campaign depended upon a victory here. Trees were felled to form a rampart for his marksmen, and earthen platforms were built for his artillery, so that the guns could command the approach up the valley.

Two men rode into view carrying a white flag. Kemper and Gutierrez rode down the hill to meet them and were amazed to recognize Johnny Durst, a wide grin on his face. His companion was a handsome, well-built man, whose grizzled hair framed a genial, ruddy face.

"I hear you have an army with you, Johnny," Kemper hailed him. "What's the meaning of it?"

Johnny Durst made the introductions. His companion was Samuel Davenport, a partner in the trading firm of Barr & Davenport, and the outstanding citizen of the section. Johnny Durst and his brother had been taken in by the bighearted Irishman as orphan children. Finally, having no sons of his own, he had legally adopted Johnny.

"My boy has told us all about your plans," he said, "and we're in sympathy with them. It's your army that's bothering us. It's composed of ruffians from the Neutral Ground."

"We have some of them," Kemper admitted. "But we have settlers, too, whose womenfolk are waiting in Natchitoches. We aim to keep this country after we win it. They're the ones we're depending on for that."

Davenport seemed to like this sort of talk. "What about these outlaws? Can you control them? We want no pillaging."

"We've come to chase the Spaniards out," was Kemper's reply. "We want friends here, not enemies. I'll be responsible for my men."

"In that case"—Davenport held out his hand—"you've found them. There's not a man in all this section who won't help you. Welcome to Nacogdoches!"

Magee caught up with the army as it was leaving Quirk's. He had fifty horsemen with him, recruits from New Orleans. Davenport's sympathy for the cause assured their welcome in Nacogdoches, and when he threw open the second floor of his store for Magee's use as headquarters, volunteers flocked in by dozens. Valuable stores were acquired too. When Kemper approached, Colonel Zambrano had been trapped here with a pack train of sixty mules and a hundred armed drivers, on their way to Natchitoches on a trading expedition. The guards had deserted, and Zambrano had escaped with Colonel Montero.

Among the royal stores seized were a quantity of flour, powder, ammunition, lances, six hundred mules and horses, eighty thousand pounds of wool and a quantity of silver.

The new troops were organized rapidly. Despallier was given the task of organizing a new company composed of Mexicans who had deserted from Montero and Zambrano. James Gaines raised a company from the town and outlying ranches. McFarland, an experienced Indian fighter, was commissioned a captain with authority to recruit among the Indians. The army now was about five hundred strong—three hundred Americans, the rest newly recruited Mexican troops.

Johnny Durst, accompanying Captain Ross back to Natchitoches with the captured mules and wool, brought Cecily a detailed account of their venture. "Where is Jonty's company? How are they all?" she wanted to know.

"They're fine," Johnny told her.

"And everything is safe in Nacogdoches now, isn't it?" she inquired.

Johnny Durst laughed confidently. "Nacogdoches will be just a base from now on," he declared. "The war's over as far as we are concerned there. The fighting will be around San Antonio."

"Then there's no reason I can't come that far," Cecily decided. "I'll be just as well off there as here, and far less lonely. At least I'll get to see my family once in a while, and I won't have so long to wait for news."

Teresa, too, was impatient to be off. These successes foretold the realization of her soaring ambition. Already, this was her army, Texas her country, and the throne Miguel Salazar had described awaited her in San Antonio de Bexar. Miguel, who functioned at Natchitoches as a forwarding agent for men and supplies, and could not leave yet, finally acceded to her wishes.

Captain Ross was returning to Nacogdoches and she would have safe escort. Although his permission was given reluctantly, he felt that it was wise to pamper her interest in his vision of empire.

The two girls traveled in the same convoy. Cecily Marsten stared in astonishment at the rococo yellow coach with the

prancing white horses. Teresa, leaning back on her cushions, did not even notice the girl who rode in the wagon.

Kirk's Scouts ranged as far west as Trinidad de Salcedo. They spent one night in a thicket along the river, so close to Trinidad that they could hear the bugle summoning the men to mass in the morning. That night Étienne Vauban slipped into the village for information. It was nearly midnight when he returned, and his report was encouraging. Montero had managed to assemble a force of only about fifty men, all but ten of whom were half-hearted volunteers. Wild rumors too, were current about the strength of Magee's force. "They say we have soldiers by the thousan's," the trapper declared, and then with a twinkle in his eye, added, "Their ears are so beeg, m'sieur, Étienne tol' them we have two armies. *Voilà,* thees king will find no soldier to fight us here."

Jonathan reported to Magee as soon as he returned. Magee turned to Davenport. "Issue rations to each company immediately. Tomorrow we march on San Antonio." To Jonathan he said: "I have a surprise for you. We're all having supper together at a place I know."

Cecily Marsten admitted them to an adobe cottage. The colonel had sent Johnny Durst on ahead to warn her, loaded down with an armful of provisions. It was like the evenings in Natchitoches, with all of them talking at once, but the talk was more of past experiences shared than of the unknown future. Only once was their venture mentioned.

"After San Antonio, what?" Johnny Durst asked Magee.

The colonel was silent for a moment, his eyes measuring them. "That will be only the beginning." He spoke deliberately. "San Antonio is the capital of a vast country. We'll set up an American republic. If the Spaniards keep sending armies against us, we'll keep moving farther south and west. Our borders must be safe. If they let us alone, Texas is big enough for my ambition."

"That reminds me of something. Cissy has a surprise for you." Johnny Durst looked at the girl inquiringly. "Is it ready?"

Cecily took a package from the familiar chest, and handed

it to Magee. The colonel unwrapped the parcel. Cecily had made him a flag. It was of green silk with a yellow fringe. Magee held it up for them all to see. "It's a beautiful flag, Cissy," he said, "and I'm glad you chose this color. It's appropriate. Texas is a green country. Your flag will be planted on the walls of San Antonio. You're our Betsy Ross."

Gaiety made the evening short, and it was late before they realized it. With the army moving at dawn, Kirk's Scouts soon would have to be in the saddle. Ben Marsten and Cris were sleeping at home. The others, assigned no quarters, intended to bed down on the floor of Magee's headquarters. But when they arrived there a shadow detached itself from the building and plucked the Virginian by the sleeve. It was José.

"The Golden One is here," he whispered. "Come. I will take you to her."

"Jontee," she murmured. "Jontee, I thought you would never come."

She clung to him, her lips crushed to his. She had not guessed that love could be like this. It always had been something to accept, not something to give.

She had forgotten her night gown's sheer material was never meant to conceal her lithe body. Had she remembered, it would not have mattered. But the sight disturbed Jonathan, who had never seen a woman so. Then her arms were about him and he could feel the warmth of her, under his hands. Her laugh was soft as she clutched him to her, so fiercely that she could feel the bruise of the thong which held his powder horn. The sound in her throat was wordless—a cooing moan—which he tried to stifle with kisses. There was no end to their hunger for each other.

It was hard for him to tell her how soon they must part, but their hour was slipping by.

She stared at him incredulously. "But you must rest," she urged. "My bed is here."

Again she felt his arms trembling about her and looking up, she read the torment in his face. She did not fully understand the young idealism that had placed her on a pedestal, but she

guessed it vaguely and was too shrewd to challenge it. Not yet. She pushed him from her, reluctantly.

"I was only thinking of you, darling."

"I know." He kissed her, gently this time.

"It won't always be this way," he promised. "Once we have won this war, I'll have time for nothing but you. I'm going to find a plantation on the banks of some river and build you a palace, where we'll live happily the rest of our lives and nothing will ever part us again."

The word "palace" suggested the plans brewing in her mind. "Sometimes I dream of such things," she said.

"You are so beautiful," he murmured. "There never was a queen like you."

She nestled into his arms, meeting his farewell kiss. He loved her. That was enough. The rest would come.

Chapter 8

The Siege of Bahia

THE NIGHT was still black as Jonathan Kirk's Scouts clattered out of the town. It was two days' hard riding to Trinidad de Salcedo. Étienne, who crept into the village after nightfall, returned with the report that the enemy had fallen back. Accounts of Magee's strength were so exaggerated and the proclamations issued by Gutierrez had been so effective, that the Spanish volunteers had deserted. Left with only ten men to face the approaching army, Montero had retreated to San Antonio.

"Thees ees one of the bullets that sent the Spaniards running, m'sieur." Étienne held up a handbill he had found in the town. It was one of Don Bernardo's circulars, headed, "Why do you fight for the *gachupines?*"

"What's a *gachupine?*" Cris asked when the edict was translated.

"It means a man who wears spurs," Ben Marsten explained. "Actually it's a contemptuous epithet applied to arrogant Spaniards. 'Death to the *gachupines!*' was the war cry of the Hidalgo Revolution.

"That explains why so many Mexicans have joined us. If we can make this a *gachupine* war, they'll be on our side."

As proof of this contention, Jonathan was overwhelmed by volunteers, eager to join the army, when he led his scouts into the town. A messenger was sent riding to inform Magee. The army spent several days there in spite of Magee's impatience. He wanted to hit the enemy quickly, but a messenger had arrived from Nacogdoches with word that nearly two hundred additional volunteers were on their way. His force was too small to ignore such re-enforcements. When the westward march was resumed, there were more than eight hundred men

in the ranks: about two hundred native Mexicans, eighty Indians and more than six hundred American volunteers.

Kirk's Scouts were again in advance. They had no trouble crossing the Trinidad and Navasota Rivers, but the Brazos was another matter.

The army was five days crossing the roaring flooded river, swollen by recent rains, floating its supplies over on log rafts. The crossing, however, was finally accomplished with no losses more serious than a few sacks of corn spilled when a boat capsized. They were now more than three hundred miles deep in Texas territory—well over half the distance to the capital.

Kirk's Scouts encountered an enemy patrol at the Colorado River, two days beyond the Brazos. Jess Leeman and Tom Sartin, in the lead, almost rode straight into the outpost. There were only three men in the party. Two escaped but the third was captured. The prisoner was quite willing to talk. Governor Manuel Salcedo was waiting at the Guadalupe River crossing with fourteen hundred men, he said. Jonathan was suspicious of the story. It would have to be investigated.

Giles Brady and Étienne Vauban, whom Jonathan adjudged the two best woodsmen, were sent ahead to scout. They returned with confirmation of the prisoner's story. Magee, received the news, immediately called a council of war. Gutierrez was in favor of pushing on to the Guadalupe. "Sooner or later we'll have to fight him," he declared.

Magee vetoed this. "I want to meet Salcedo, but I don't want him to pick the battleground. He's thirty miles from his base and we'd be nearly four hundred from ours. Let's leave him waiting there and get us a base of our own. How far is La Bahia?"

"I guess it at about a hundred and fifty miles from here," Davenport replied.

"We can beat him to it." Magee was positive. "We'll be halfway there before he can guess our intention. With a base at La Bahia, we're less than a hundred miles from San Antonio, and better still, we'll be south of it and a threat to his communications. He'll have to come to us." The others agreed. Magee's decisions always were quick and convincing.

The road to La Bahia had branched off at Trinidad and lay miles to the south. In open country this was not a serious handicap. The colonel detached Lockett's company to assist Kirk's Scouts in masking the army's movement. Lockett was to advance one day's march toward San Antonio in an effort to deceive Salcedo's outposts into thinking that no change had been made in their plans. Jonathan's scouts were to patrol Magee's right flank, guarding against the filtering through of any spy who might report their movements. These precautions taken, the forced march began.

The night of November thirteenth a biting wind blew down from the north, but Magee would permit no fires. They were approaching La Bahia. There had been no word of Salcedo in days. Lockett's force was somewhere back up the weary trail. The army was allowed a four-hour rest while Magee sent Jonathan and his scouts ahead to reconnoiter.

"Get somebody into the town and find out what you can," he ordered. "I want to know the strength of the garrison and what's become of Salcedo."

As usual, this task fell to Étienne. This was an old settlement with a fort or presidio in the town and a mission across the river, less than a mile away. It was a prosperous town with a population of about fifteen hundred.

The trapper soon returned with the needed information. The fort was strong, enclosing a considerable area defended by sixteen cannon. However, the cannon were old and in bad condition, the garrison numbered only one hundred and sixty men and there was no word of Salcedo's coming. Jonathan sent a messenger back to Magee with the news. The colonel galloped up with fifty men from Perry's company.

"Come on, Jonty. We're going in," he said. "And I'd like to see Salcedo's face when he learns where we are."

They were sixty strong as they clattered through the silent street. They rode straight to the fort where Magee, on being challenged, demanded surrender and ordered the sentry to bring the commander to him. His English made no sense to the sentry's startled ears.

The colonel turned to Davenport. "Tell him what I said."

Davenport repeated the order in Spanish.

The guard didn't even bother to send for the commandant. Almost instantly the gate swung open. *"Me rindo!"* the excited sentinel shouted, rushing out, unarmed, to surrender. The taking of La Bahia was as simple as that. The battle had been won in that long heart-breaking march.

The army was allowed one day for rest and repair of equipment before Magee started putting the defenses in order. The fort stood at the north end of the town. It was sturdily built of stone and stood on a bluff overlooking the river. The colonel ordered earthen bastions erected on either side of it, where he placed his artillery in position to command the northern approach. At the same time he took steps to provision his army, sending out several parties in search of cattle. Captain McFarland, with a strong party, was dispatched on a scouting trip to the west with instructions to advance as far as the Nueces River. This was the main road to Laredo and Mexico, and any reinforcements for Salcedo would come from this direction. Two patrols were sent northwest toward San Antonio, one on either side of the river. Lieutenant Drake of Lockett's company headed the one on the east bank. He had fourteen men. Jonathan Kirk's Scouts were on the other side. They were instructed to maintain a patrol thirty miles to the north, and keep Magee informed of any enemy movement.

Cold camps were impossible in this weather. The men's hands were numbed and blue when Jonathan called a halt for the night. He chose a spot sheltered under a high bank.

"We've got to have a fire," he said, "but I want it where it can't be seen very far."

"You're wastin' a lot of worry," Giles Brady replied. "There won't be any Spaniards prowlin' in such weather."

When Jonathan went to sleep, it was to dream of Teresa—in his arms. He was awakened by Tom Sartin shaking him.

"Our fire's been seen." Sartin was nudging each man in turn as he aroused the camp. "Thar must be a thousand of 'em."

Jonathan clambered up the bank to look for himself. The light still was uncertain but he could distinguish movement on

the plain above. Giles Brady was watching, too. "'Pears like they got us surrounded," he observed. "An thar's plenty of 'em. I reckon we're in a mite of a jamb."

The Spaniards were closing in slowly. Indistinct forms were beginning to take shape. A large body of cavalry circled them on three sides. The river at their back was their only hope of escape but Jonathan was wary of a trap. It seemed unreasonable to believe that such an obvious line of retreat would remain unguarded. Yet it must be attempted. Magee must be warned of the enemy's approach. "We'll try the river," he said. "And remember this. Whoever gets through must carry the word to Magee."

Rifle fire broke out behind them, across the stream. An irregular volley was followed by scattered shots. It ended almost as quickly as it began.

Giles jerked his thumb in that direction. "I reckon that was Drake's company. They had 'em surrounded, too. Didn't last long, did they?"

Jonathan had a clearer picture of the situation now. The enemy line was advancing on both sides of the river at once. "Saddle up, quick," he ordered. "We're getting out of here."

He was mounting as he continued, "Our best chance is to be where they least expect us, so we'll cross here. There's a possibility that they broke their lines when they closed in on Drake's camp. Besides, they'll figure us to head straight south for La Bahia. We won't do that. We'll ride north. We'll stay under the bank as long as possible and take it easy, hoping to slip through if we can. If we're seen—" he gripped his gun more firmly—"we'll fight our way through. Everybody understand?"

They reached Bahia that night in time to advise Magee of the enemy's approach, the only scouts who returned safely. Alerted by this warning, Magee was ready when Governor Salcedo approached the next day. The *gachupine* army rode in from the north and occupied the Espiritu Santo mission less than a mile away. Jonathan was on the tower at the fort with Magee, watching them. The enemy forces were spread out in the distance like toy soldiers. "He knows his business," the

colonel remarked as he watched Salcedo deploy his troops on the plain.

Magee estimated the royal army at about fifteen hundred men. There were horses to spare. Even the infantry was riding as it entered the plain. Jonathan counted fourteen pieces of artillery massed before the mission. This was almost a fort itself, with sturdy walls enclosing the rectangular group of stone buildings.

As they watched, the flag of royal Spain was unfurled from the mission tower.

The twisting San Antonio River formed a horseshoe, open to the north and almost encircling a plain about three-quarters of a mile in diameter. The mission stood near the open end of the shoe. The town of La Bahia and its fort were located on a high bluff across the river at its apex, which was pointed south. The river was about twenty yards wide, for the most part deep but with several accessible fords.

The plain below was commanded by the guns mounted on the fort.

A picket line was thrown out under command of Captain Ross, and here the enemy was first engaged. Spanish cavalry advancing toward the river was driven back. From his position in the tower Magee had a clear view of the entire action. It was as though he were watching an animated map. Salcedo wasn't wasting time. He sent three columns of infantry forward in support, one deploying in the center, the others advancing in solid columns along the flanks. The American commander was equally determined to win this initial battle. He threw his entire force into the action immediately, and had the advantage of anticipating his opponent's moves. Captain Gaines, with his company of Nacogdoches Mexicans, was hurried to the left flank to halt the column advancing there. Perry's company was rushed forward in support of Ross, while Lockett was sent to stop the column on the right. Jonathan and his scouts accompanied him. The royal troops walked into traps on their flanks and a determined resistance in the center. They were trying to move in military rank against expert marksmen, frontiersmen who knew how to take advantage of all available cover. After about two hours, Salcedo's troops were driven back.

Magee was in high spirits. "That's what we needed. One good general engagement under our belts. The men will have more confidence now they know they can whip regulars."

Governor Salcedo took vigorous measures to invest La Bahia at once, placing outposts both up and down the river on both sides, and driving in the American pickets. After that, Magee's principal problem became one of supply. An ample supply of corn had been stored at La Bahia, but beef was lacking. Scouting parties were organized to slip through the enemy lines and drive in cattle at night accordingly.

Miguel Salazar arrived in La Bahia when the siege was a month old, coming through the lines at night with a party of Lockett's riflemen. Jonathan was away with his company in search of beef when Salazar came and it was a week before they met at Magee's headquarters. When Jonathan entered the room, a discussion was in progress between Magee and Kemper, on the one hand, and Gutierrez and Salazar on the other.

"Well, Jonty, what luck this time?" Magee inquired.

Miguel glanced up casually and then, when he recognized the newcomer, the pockmarks which pitted his face whitened perceptibly. Magee noticed this.

"I haven't forgotten that you two have a quarrel," he said brusquely. "But I want to remind you that we're at war now. I won't tolerate any private feuds. Do I make myself clear?"

Salazar smiled. "You're right, as usual, Colonel." He glanced once more at Jonathan as he left the room. He was not smiling then.

When he reached his quarters, his eyes were slits of hatred. "Where's Clampit?" he demanded of Luiz. "I must see him at once."

But a messenger arrived from Magee's headquarters before Salazar could see the gambler. Salcedo had sent a request for a parley, under a flag of truce, and Magee wished him to attend. The opposing commanders met at the ford just below the town. With governor Salcedo were Colonel Simon Herrera, former governor of the colony, Colonel Montero, who had abandoned Nacogdoches, and a bugler. Magee had brought

Gutierrez, Salazar, Kemper, Perry, Gaines and Despallier. Ross and Lockett were left in command of the town during the parley, at Gutierrez' insistence. He feared treachery. Salcedo spoke English, having traveled extensively in the United States.

"Your position is hopeless, Colonel." He addressed all of his remarks to Magee, not deigning to look at Gutierrez. "I am prepared to offer magnanimous terms for your surrender. I believe you have been misled in this adventure, and I offer you an adjustment whereby you may retire with honor."

Magee smiled.

"What are these terms?"

"Lay down your arms and surrender your position. In return, I offer a safe conduct for you and your troops back to the border. You will be accorded all the honors of war and, in addition, one man in each four may retain his rifle. However—" he glanced at Gutierrez—"you have with you some revolutionists who are Spanish subjects. I cannot offer them terms. I refer specifically to Bernardo Gutierrez and a man who calls himself Salazar. These two must be turned over to me."

Magee smiled again.

"In return, I'll offer Your Excellency the same generous terms," he replied. "You may retire below the Rio Grande with such of your troops as wish to accompany you, and I will permit one man in four to carry his arms. The capitulation, of course, includes San Antonio de Bexar."

"You offer me terms!" Salcedo exclaimed. "I thought I was dealing with a sensible man."

There the interview ended.

Clampit was waiting in Salazar's quarters when he returned.

"You told me Jonathan Kirk was dead," the Spaniard said angrily. "You even described the scene most graphically. I paid you two thousand dollars on that wager. Yet I saw him here not an hour ago. He's in charge of a company of Magee's scouts."

Clampit was dazed. "It can't be," he muttered. "I stabbed him three times."

"Then someone died at Natchez but it wasn't Jonathan Kirk." Salazar's tone was deadly. "I saw him today, I tell you.

He occupies a cot in Magee's quarters. I want him killed tonight."

"Show me the house," the gambler said.

Clampit stood crouched over Jonathan's bed, peering down. There would be no mistake this time. The moonlight made identification easy.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" Magee demanded from the doorway.

As the gambler whirled to face him, the colonel caught the glint of his knife. He did not shout an alarm. Instead, he charged. Clampit's arm moved swiftly. The pale light glittered on the speeding blade.

Magee's challenge aroused Jonathan. He awoke with senses alert. There was no time to identify anyone. He saw only a shadow moving beside him and he heard Magee's gasp as he fell. He still did not know what had happened, but he sensed the danger as he leaped for the man beside him.

Clampit's attention had been momentarily diverted by the colonel's entrance. Now he struck savagely at Jonathan, twisting away from his outstretched arms. He was unarmed now and no match, he realized, for the brawny Virginian in a rough and tumble scramble. The punch threw his assailant off balance. That gave him precious seconds. He sprang for the fallen Magee.

The blade gleamed wet and red when he recovered it. Jonathan was on him before he could turn. There was no time to throw it. The impetus of the rush hurled the gambler against the wall, even as he was twisting to strike. A crushing fist rattled his head against the masonry. He was dazed but desperate. Once more the gambler swung with his weapon, but now Jonathan had seen the knife and was grappling for it, clutching his opponent by the wrist. They fought with a rash fury. Powerless to swing his hand, the gambler kicked out viciously, catching Jonathan in the stomach. He stumbled back under the impact, sickened, but still clutching that wrist and wrenching at it so violently that the knife clattered to the floor. Both men dove for it.

As Jonathan reached across Magee's body his hand was sud-

denly warm and slippery, but his fingers gripped the hilt surely. Blood! The meaning of Magee's quiet was red in his mind as he lashed savagely at his opponent, striking again and again in his fury, even after the man was limp.

Jonathan crouched there, the dagger wet in his hand, for some time before the mist cleared from his brain. Then he rose painfully and stumbled in search of a candle. Its blaze flickered uncertainly in the breeze from the unshuttered window. His eyes were dazed as he stared at the wild disorder of the room and the two still forms on the floor. Dark stains were creeping across the uneven puncheons in a spreading pool. His eyes widened when he recognized Clampit, but his first thought was for Magee.

He lifted his commander to the couch and pressed his shirt against the wound from which the blood still poured. "The doctor," he thought. "Dr. Forsythe. I must get him quickly. It may not be too late."

The physician was quartered in the same house with Kemper. Jonathan was still dazed when he awoke them. "Come quick." His voice was almost a sob. "It's Magee."

Neither man needed a second summons from this wild messenger, half dressed and covered with blood. Kemper's voice was heavy with anxiety as they ran toward the scene.

"What happened?" he demanded.

"It was Clampit the gambler. You remember him. That's all I know," Jonathan replied. "I'm afraid Magee's dead."

Magee was dead. Clampit's knife had caught him just below the heart. There was nothing the doctor could do. The gambler was dead, too, of a dozen wounds.

Chapter 9

The Battle of the White Cow

LATER, AS JONATHAN told his story, Kemper's burly shoulders sagged, his face was bleak. Perry stirred uneasily about the room, swearing softly under his breath. There were frank tears in Despallier's eyes. The dour McFarland stood at the door, scowling silently. Gaines's face was forbidding in its baffled fury. Lockett stood by Jonathan Kirk, his grim stare fixed on the floor's red stains.

"We could more easily have lost a battle!" exclaimed the voluble Gutierrez. "Magee was worth an army! Our loss is irreparable!"

His words reminded them of the need for immediate decisions. Gutierrez was their nominal chief, but in their shocked grief the officers turned to Kemper for leadership and he presided at their council. Gutierrez should continue as head of the expedition, they decided, and his role should be emphasized before the men, but Kemper was elected to take Magee's place as military commander, with the rank of colonel.

It was thought best for Magee's murder to be kept secret from the troops, at least for the present. His leadership had had a singularly personal quality. Many of these men followed ambition, but few were fighting for a belief.

Magee's burial, accordingly, was delayed for three days. Only when Dr. Forsythe insisted it could be deferred no longer was word finally passed that he was dead. It had been pneumonia that had claimed him, some said. And then another story started. A native woman who cleaned Magee's quarters told a strange tale of dark stains on the floor. The colonel, she whispered, had taken his own life. The story went the rounds of the camp. Most men scoffed at it, but it persisted, a disturbing rumor.

Supplies were running low in the besieged town. Salcedo's troops had killed off most of the available cattle and the siege lines were growing ever tighter. At this time a recruit was taken into Jonathan's company. His name was Pablo Savias and he was a native of La Bahia.

"Captain, I can get you meat," was the way he approached Jonathan.

At first he had not been taken seriously. But the man persisted in his offers, and when he volunteered to go out alone, Jonathan finally relented. "We probably won't see him again but it will be just one less mouth to feed here," he told Cris Marsten. Three nights later Pablo Savias returned, driving seven beeves ahead of him.

It was the garrison's hunger that brought about the Battle of the White Cow. Where the animal came from no one knew, but she emerged from the trees below the fort, ambling quietly toward the ford and the *gachupine* lines beyond. Jonathan's company was on outpost duty.

"Eh bien!" Étienne exclaimed. "I see bifstek."

Cris Marsten leaped to his feet. "Let's get her," he shouted.

The cow heard them coming and broke into a trot. The scouts spread out in pursuit. They were midway between the lines now, on the plains below the fort, but the Spaniards were taking no apparent interest in the foray. O'Rourke and Cris headed the cow off and started her back toward the river. Their mission seemed to have been safely accomplished before they realized what had happened. A company of Spaniards, either on patrol or after the cow themselves, had made its way around the curving river, sheltered from view by the heavy growth along its bank. They were between Kirk's Scouts and the ford when they opened fire.

"Down! Everybody down!" Jonathan shouted.

They took cover in the tall grass and returned the volley. The gunfire precipitated action on both sides. The royal army, seeing how the little patrol was trapped, started in strength to finish them off. The Americans, in the fort above, were equally quick to grasp the situation. Lockett's company was stationed along the earthen embankment where the artillery was mounted. They now charged down the slope to drive the enemy

away from the ford and open Jonathan's line of retreat.

Salcedo and Herrera had watched this chance development of battle with interest. The royal commander welcomed the opportunity for an engagement in the open, and steadily re-enforced his line as it advanced across the plain. Kirk's Scouts had worked their way slowly to the shelter of the river bank, but were about two hundred yards to the left of the ford, where Lockett's men still were holding firmly against rapidly mounting odds. Despallier was next into the action, in support of Lockett. At this juncture Kemper took over and threw Gaines and Perry forward with their companies. Except for a few outposts south of the town, virtually his entire command was now in action, advancing Indian fashion through the cover of tall grass and driving the royalists back with a steady, accurate fire. The American line continued well into the plain, covering half the distance to Salcedo's headquarters at the mission, before the enemy artillery opened up, halting them.

Now Salcedo made an effort to cut them off from the town. He sent Herrera charging forward on his left at the head of a strong column. The intention was to break Gaines's line and, circling the flank, gain possession of the ford. Here a fierce hand-to-hand battle developed. This was the Nacogdoches company, composed mostly of native Mexicans, and they gave an excellent account of themselves. They stopped Herrera momentarily, but they were unable to contain his superior numbers. The line wavered but did not break. Gaines began a slow retreat, stubbornly contesting each foot of ground yielded.

Kemper was quick to see the danger to his entire line as his right flank sagged. He ordered a general withdrawal, at the same time strengthening the menaced point with what few reserves he had available.

Salcedo was relentless. He ordered an attack all along the line when he noticed the American retirement.

Kemper formed a new line along the river bank, and from its shelter the Spaniards were driven back after two fierce charges. Both sides were fighting with resolution and with equally heavy losses. By this time the battle had been in progress more than two hours, with its fortunes wavering first to one side, then to the other. Kemper's new position was a strong

one. His men were ranged around the circle of the river's horseshoe and were well protected by its cover. However, Salcedo was determined to settle the issue while he had his opponents outside their fortified positions and he dispatched couriers to the troops stationed south of the town to order an assault from that direction. This was slow in starting, but it began now. The outbreak of rifle fire from his pickets in La Bahia warned Kemper. The outposts in his rear were entirely inadequate to repel such an attack. There was nothing for him to do but order a general retreat.

This was accomplished with surprisingly small loss. Most of his force had to swim the river as Salcedo's cannon had opened up a murderous fire on the ford. Picked riflemen clung to the river's edge and held back the encroaching enemy until their companions crossed and established a new position. Jonathan's company was one of the groups left behind in this holding operation. When it came their turn to fall back he saw the white cow which had started the trouble. She had been struck by a stray bullet and had staggered to the water's edge to die.

The Spaniards already had taken the southern fringe of the town by the time Kemper was able to re-enforce his line there. A desperate house-to-house struggle began in an effort to drive them out. The cannon on the earthen embankments which flanked the fort opened up, concentrating on Salcedo's main body as it attempted to charge across the ford. They were driven back with severe losses, but the royal governor sensed that victory was within his grasp. He detached more and more men to support the troops who had won a foothold in the town. Kemper withdrew his three six-pounders to command the streets which led to the fort. They were rendered largely ineffective, however, because the streets were in reality winding lanes, limiting the range of fire. The sun set red in the smoky haze, and in the failing light the royalists began establishing bridgeheads across the river to the north and came pouring up the slope. Herrera in person led an assault which accomplished a new breach in the lines on the western edge of the town. This flanking movement threatened to cut off Perry's company. Lockett attempted a countercharge but was driven back. As this wedge grew more threatening Kemper ordered

a general retirement into the fort. It was dark now. Rifles flashed like deadly fireflies on every side.

Kirk's Scouts held a position on the north wall of the fort, their fire concentrated against the ford. They were not engaged in the seesaw struggle for the town and Jonathan was unaware of the desperate stage the battle had reached until the royalists stormed and took the south wall of the fort, pouring over into the big plaza, yelling and firing as they came. When, in his effort to keep his forces intact, Kemper ordered Perry to fall back, he had not realized that they already were engaged in hand-to-hand conflict. There was an interval when the defenders dared not fire on the struggling troops for fear of cutting down their own friends. Already their stronghold was half lost.

Kemper turned to the defenders of the north wall. They were his last reserve. "The spears," he bellowed, his great voice booming above the din. "Use the spears and come on!"

Fire-hardened wooden lances, the making of which Magee had ordered the day of his death, lay in forgotten stacks. There were perhaps a hundred men along that wall, up to now engaged in repelling the enemy without, with no thought of what was going on behind them. Now they turned and, following their leader's instructions, charged with these crude weapons. Jonathan's little company dashed forward in a compact body, clearing a path all the way to the gate. All about them little knots of men struggled. Scarcely a shot was heard now. It was lance and knife against bayonet, but hoarse shouts filled the air with sound. Slowly at first, and then more quickly as the tide began to turn, the royalists were driven back until the last of them were cleared from the fort. Magee, even in death, had provided the weapon that was to turn back defeat.

But the situation still was critical. With the town in Salcedo's hands the fort could not hope to hold out long. Kemper hurried from company to company, shouting encouragement. This, coupled with each man's realization of the plight, readied them for counterattack. Kemper led it.

"Go get 'em!" he roared. "Drive 'em out!"

There was a savage yell as the Americans followed him to the assault. Once more the battle swirled through the streets.

Jonathan's command advanced from house to house. This was rifle work. The spears were abandoned. Each building was the scene of a new battle, the conflict resolving itself into scores of miniature engagements. The scouts soon worked out a plan of action. From each new position a covering fire was opened on the next, paving the way for a charge.

Twice Cris had remained behind, firing, during these advances. Jonathan had ordered it so.

"I'm going too," he shouted rebelliously when he was waved back a third time.

Jess Leeman, Giles Brady, Étienne Vauban and Tom Sartin were charging with Jonathan this time, while the deadly rifles of the others held the enemy under cover.

"No, stay there," the leader shouted, but he had no time to look around.

Giles kicked at the door while Étienne and Jess shot through the windows. There was an answering fire from within. Étienne clutched at the stone window sill for support, but the strength was fading from his fingers, and as he collapsed, he left a crimson stain on the white wall. Sartin and Jonathan threw themselves against the resisting door and plunged sprawling into the room as it gave beneath their weight. Cris charged in over them with Giles. Their rifles blazed into the smoke-filled room.

The cornered *gachupines* fought back desperately. While Jonathan was still on his knees, he was conscious of Cris standing over him, swinging his clubbed rifle. Giles was there, too, holding the enemy back from the two men on the floor. The Spaniards had bayonets and there were six of them left. They surged forward. Jess fired through the window, bringing one down. The others closed in, with Cris and Giles still striving to drive them back. Jonathan scrambled to his feet to help. Tom Sartin, still on his knees, drew his knife, lunged under the circling bayonets, hacked viciously. Two more went down and the charge was stopped. But the outlaw fell with them, transfixed by two bayonets, his red blade still swinging.

Then Jess was clambering through the window. Gabe, O'Rourke and Pablo Savias joined them with a rush. The last resistance collapsed. They pushed on to attack the next build-

ing, and the next, leaving none behind but the dead. By nine o'clock Salcedo's troops were driven almost entirely from the town. The losses had been heavy on both sides. In Jonathan's little company both Étienne Vauban, the trapper, and Tom Sartin, the outlaw, had fallen. They buried them that night in the plot beside Magee.

The Spaniards still held one foothold in La Bahia, a stone building close to the fort. With characteristic energy Salcedo established a line of outposts connecting this house with his lines. The defenders were unaware of it until the following morning, when Kemper ordered the structures nearest the fort torn down. The *gachupine* troops began sniping. The American commander retaliated by placing Kirk's Scouts in another stone house near by from which they maintained a constant fire on the enemy bastion, so hot that they were able to protect the work parties.

The following night Antonio Delgado, son of a prominent San Antonio republican who had been executed, crept into the town. Gutierrez identified him when he was brought to headquarters. "I'm surprised to see you wearing a Spanish uniform," Don Bernardo told him.

"I had no choice," Delgado replied. "The governor pressed every able-bodied man into service. I joined you at my first opportunity." He offered to prove his sincerity. "There are two outposts connecting the stone house with Salcedo's lines. I will point them out to you," he volunteered.

His information was immediately put to test. Kemper was anxious to be rid of the Spanish bastion. Lockett's company was assigned the task. A brush fence, used as a corral, extended west of the enemy stronghold, its heavy shadow offering concealment. This approach was used in the stealthy advance upon the outposts; they were surrounded and attacked silently with knives. Delgado proved himself further by joining in the assault. The following morning the defenders of the stone house, cut off from their lines, surrendered.

The town once more was completely in Kemper's hands. The condition of the army, however, grew progressively worse. Regardless of the difficulty, patrols constantly attempted to

get through the Spanish lines but, more often than not, they returned empty-handed. Rations were reduced, and to add to the discouragement, Salcedo had received re-enforcements and his long-awaited heavy guns had arrived. The siege was nearly four months old and, with Magee gone, the Americans had little reason to hope of success. But the enemy had captured nearly all their horses, and retreat was out of the question.

Morning after morning the scouts watched the Spaniards drive big herds of horses out to graze. Each time they took the same route, which led by the now half-ruined brush fence.

"I'd like to be layin' out thar behint that brush some mornin' when they go by," Jess Leeman once observed. "I'd shore cause 'em a heap o' trouble."

That gave Jonathan his idea. He approached Kemper for permission to ambush the *gachupines*. Kemper granted consent.

For several days there had been another cold snap but the weather moderated that night, and the morning dawned with a warm, gray mist hugging the ground, like clouds wandered down from the sky. A number of volunteers had begged to accompany Kirk's Scouts on the venture, and forty men crouched behind the fence as the Spanish *remuda* came trotting by. About five hundred horses were in the band, driven by thirty men. Jonathan waited until they were abreast of the ambush, in point-blank range, before giving the word. All but two of the *vaqueros* went down in the first volley.

Once more an isolated incident led to a pitched battle. The ambush was close to the Spanish lines and Salcedo tried to prevent their return. The Americans in the town, warned of the ambuscade in advance, had gathered to watch. And Kemper, to protect Jonathan's retreat, had manned the three six-pounders and trained them on the enemy line. Now these guns opened fire, driving back the first Spanish charge, but their roar sounded a challenge which echoed all along the *gachupine* line.

In its first stages the battle developed much as had the previous one, with the Spaniards attacking and Kemper throwing out strong support for the scouts. Artillery went into action on both sides, but its fire was not accurate, due to the fog

which half obscured the charging men. Salcedo, to overcome this difficulty, hurried one battery up to the front line, not forty yards from the position to which Kirk's Scouts still clung. Jonathan's decision was due more to desperation than valor. If the battery went into action at this range, its effect would be ruinous. He ordered a charge and his men responded with a savage yell. They were at the throats of the surprised *gachupines* before they had time to fire a volley and the guns were captured.

From the American lines that charge was barely discernible, its objective shrouded in the mist. For an instant the army watched, breathless at its audacity. Then, with a wild cheer, it sprang to the attack and came charging across the plain. No one gave the order. It was spontaneous.

Salcedo didn't see them coming. He saw his battery captured and hurled a company of cavalry out to retake it, unaware of what was happening behind those clouds. Jonathan's command stood in a tight little knot, their rifles spitting viciously. There were empty saddles in the galloping line but the odds were overwhelming. On it came.

Then there was a wild yell. Kemper's entire army was charging to their aid. The fury of the attack caught the royalists completely by surprise. Their line recoiled from the impact, wavered momentarily, and then plunged in headlong flight.

From the town the church bells began to ring. Someone found a rocket. It exploded noisily in the air, unseen in the gloom. The inhabitants, sensing victory, once more had grown enthusiastic. Included among the prisoners was Salcedo's band. Whoops of delight greeted the appearance of the musicians as they were marched into La Bahia.

"Let's have a concert," someone shouted.

"Make 'em play for us, Colonel," called another.

Kemper, whose humor matched theirs, had another idea. He held up his hand for attention.

"Tomorrow," he promised. "I'll give you all the music you want. But first they've got to practice up on our kind of tunes."

All that day the band was locked in the chapel of the fort where the thick walls would muffle their efforts. He wanted nothing to spoil his surprise.

For months the besieged army had been roused each morning by the sound of Salcedo's band, its solemn notes calling the royal troops to mass. It was Salcedo's turn to be awakened. Next morning the band was massed behind the earthen artillery parapet, blasting the early calm with its shrill clatter. The tune had been hastily learned, but whatever its musical deficiencies, it lacked nothing in volume. It was an air strange to Spanish ears. They were playing "Yankee Doodle!"

"Again! Play it again!" Kemper would bellow, each time they tried to stop.

The besieged army first doubted its ears. Then, as the tune was recognized, it laughed. The merriment swelled to a gleeful roar as the men swarmed to the barricades to peer across at the enemy.

The royal governor retired to his tent, but he couldn't shut out the sound of their hilarity. Nor the wheezy repetition of "Yankee Doodle," as his former band kept to its task.

Just one week later Salcedo gave up the siege. It had lasted more than four months.

Chapter 10

Conquest

CECILY, WAITING at Nacogdoches, shared the anxiety of the town during the siege. The messages, first favorable, gradually changed in tone. Report of Magee's death was the first stunning blow. Later, deserters made their shamefaced appearance, furtively at first, then as their numbers swelled they walked the streets defiantly. The cause was lost, they said; any further struggle would be useless sacrifice.

The couriers always rode first to Davenport's store. Cecily haunted the place, hopeful for some word. Several times letters came from Cris and her father, and from them she gleaned scraps of information about the scouts. This day they had driven a herd of beeves through the lines. On another they had evaded an enemy patrol. One messenger brought her money after the troops had been paid. She read and reread these letters, trying to picture what La Bahia was like and something of their life there. Sometimes Jonathan was mentioned. Evidently Kirk's Scouts had achieved a reputation, and she sensed Cris's pride in it. She read those passages most frequently.

"Your green flag flies over the fort here," Cris wrote once. "Gutierrez calls us the Republican Army of the North; among ourselves the men name it the Green Flag Army. Jonty always terms it 'Cissy's flag.' "

The messengers were apt to be more informative than the letters. Johnny Durst told her the most. He had been to La Bahia twice, escorting supplies through the lines. "They're fit as fiddles," he assured her. "Don't worry. They know how to take care of themselves, and good old Jonty looks after 'em like a hen with a brood of chicks. He's turned out a real soldier, Jonty has. There's not a better liked man in La Bahia."

He told her about the company's escape from the enemy trap

along the river. "Kirk's Scouts were the only ones who got through with the warning," he said. "The others were all captured. I tell you Jonty knows what he's doing."

Cecily was avid for stories like that.

Teresa de Lerdo was impatient with waiting, too. Miguel stayed in Nacogdoches briefly before going on to join the army. His visit was difficult. His touch was only a cruel reminder of a desire denied her. Jonathan was much in her mind.

"What's wrong with you?" Miguel demanded, his fingers biting at her shoulder.

"It's this waiting," she evaded. "Why must Magee stay cooped up in that town? Why doesn't he go out and fight?"

Miguel pulled her to him, laughing. "Have I given you a dream that's made you forget me?"

"Of course not, Miguel. You're a part of it." She submitted to his embrace and was suddenly tender, but she was relieved when he left for La Bahia.

News that the siege of La Bahia had ended stirred Nacogdoches to an excitement all the more extravagant because it was so unexpected. The church bells rang out the message. Davenport fired off the cannon in the plaza. The streets were filled with cheering people whose faces had almost lost the memory of smiles. The importance of the triumph was magnified. Final victory seemed very close.

A small party of New Orleans volunteers had been waiting at Davenport's store for several days. When José brought word that these men would leave on the morrow, Teresa ordered her coach at once. The six Americans stared with openmouthed amazement at the prancing white horses and the yellow coach. When its beautiful occupant announced her determination to go with them they did not disguise their consternation.

"I am going, either with you or alone," she announced when their leader protested. "Surely you are too generous to refuse me your company."

"But you don't know what you're getting into, ma'am," the frontiersman protested weakly.

"How do you think I came here?" she retorted. "I will be ready when you are in the morning." The volunteers gawked after her coach.

Her escort was inclined to resent her presence at first, but Teresa was in an engaging mood now that the long period of waiting had ended. The volunteers adapted their gait to hers and by the time they reached Trinidad de Salcedo, she had captivated them all. Her camps were miracles of comfort on that rough trail. The guards vied with one another in shy services to make her trip pleasant.

They made camp early each night for her convenience. For a time they posted sentries, but as the peaceful days wore on, this vigilance was relaxed. That made them easy prey for Salcedo's patrol which, warned by the light of their fire, swooped down upon them in the night and captured the entire party.

When word reached Governor Manuel Salcedo that a great lady named de Lerdo had been captured while traveling in her coach, he was puzzled. The de Lerdos were his kinsmen. How could one of them be in this country without his knowledge? And a woman, traveling only with servants and American ruffians—it was unthinkable! Then he heard of the weird yellow coach and remembered that Miguel Salazar was at La Bahia. That explained everything and he took a grim satisfaction from the meeting when she reached the capital.

"When did you leave Salazar?" he demanded.

Teresa knew she was recognized. Her best recourse, she thought, was her femininity. Her smile was provocative, but her beauty did not beguile Salcedo. His eyes were hard.

"Unfortunately we do not make war on women," he remarked, "but as you are known to be in league with the enemy, we shall have to hold you prisoner. This house will be yours. I've posted guards here but they will not bother you unless you try to leave. And—" he paused at the door—"you'll henceforth drop the name de Lerdo. From now on you will be known as the woman Teresa."

He closed the door after him with unnecessary violence.

When Kemper and Gutierrez left La Bahia their force had swelled to more than thirteen hundred men. To oppose them Salcedo who had made an orderly retreat, had assembled an army of twenty-five hundred men, of whom fifteen hundred were regulars. Kemper's scouts had informed him of the Span-

ish strength, and he advanced on San Antonio cautiously, remembering the trap Salcedo had tried to spring on Magee.

But there was no sign of the royalists until Kemper's patrols had sighted the mission towers, south of the Texas capital. About nine miles from San Antonio the low ridge of Rosillo Hill divided San Antonio River and Salado Creek. Its west slope was an open prairie but the side bordering the Salado was covered with chaparral. This provided good cover for the ambush which Salcedo cunningly prepared. The position commanded the ford across the creek and he hoped to surprise the approaching army. His entire force was concealed here, with his artillery massed in the center.

Kirk's Scouts were moving ahead of the army. Jonathan called a halt when he saw the stream ahead. "I don't like the looks of it," he said. "If Salcedo is going to make a stand before we reach San Antonio, this is the place."

They were already within easy range of the waiting enemy but not a shot was fired. Salcedo wasn't ready to show his hand.

Jonathan sent Kemper word of his intent and then led his little troop in a wide circle to cross the Salado several miles farther north. Slipping cautiously down the opposite bank, they scouted the ford from the rear. The horses were left with Gabe. The others advanced stealthily along the ridge until Giles Brady gripped Jonathan's arm and pointed. Ahead, in a little clearing, sat General Salcedo surrounded by a group of officers. The patrol lingered just long enough to determine the nature of the ambush and the size of the waiting force.

Salcedo, watching from his hilltop, could see Kemper's campfires twinkling like fallen stars. He might have wondered at their size, for it was a warm night.

For an hour the officers listened as Jonathan outlined the enemy position in detail, tracing a map in the dust to illustrate the location of hill and creek. After that, camp was broken. Only Gaines's company remained behind to feed the fires. Kirk's Scouts led the way as the army repeated Magee's maneuver and marched around Salcedo's trap. Dawn found them safely across the Salado, about five miles above the ford, with

Kemper devising a trap of his own.

Lockett was on the extreme right, with orders to advance along the ridge, and Kirk's Scouts were with him. Here the first action developed. Puzzled by the non-appearance of his enemy, Salcedo had ordered up a company of cavalry to cross the ford toward Kemper's camp and investigate. This troop was riding carelessly across the ridge, the men laughing and joking together. They thought themselves well in the rear of their own lines. Lockett's men opened fire, driving them back in disorder.

Colonel Montero was in command of the detachment. Instead of turning he charged, calling on his men to follow. Only a few yards separated the advancing officer from the thicket where Ben Marsten stood. The horse lunged into the chaparral. Marsten dodged back. His rifle was empty. Montero raised his sword and leaned forward in his saddle.

Jonathan saw the situation but, like Marsten, he had only an empty rifle and was too far away to do anything. As the colonel's sword descended in a swishing arc, Denis O'Rourke appeared from nowhere. His brawny arms dragged Marsten clear of the blade. Someone fired and Montero tumbled from his horse, dead.

When the others rushed up, Marsten was scrambling to his feet, shaken but unhurt. O'Rourke wasn't so fortunate. The saber had caught him at the shoulder, slashing the length of his arm. " 'Tis just a small thing," he assured them, clutching at his sleeve, but his face was white. They made a touniquet and tried to stop the gush of blood.

The firing had grown general now, all along the line. They went on into the battle, leaving their friend behind, propped against a tree. Off to their left, heavy volleys thundered above the steady din of irregular musketry, but Jonathan could see nothing from here. When they overtook Lockett, he was forming a skirmish line in the brush, facing the Spanish artillery.

"Keep those guns out of action," the captain ordered. "Pick off the gunners and we'll win this fight."

Jonathan took careful aim at the nearest cannoneer and squeezed the trigger. Jess Leeman on his left and Giles Brady on his right were doing the same thing. As their malignant

fire increased, a pungent haze began to drift across the crest like an untimely fog. The carnage around Salcedo's artillery was sinister: only one cannon ever spoke, and it roared but once. A determined effort was made to man the guns but the artillerymen still living were driven back before the battle was well begun.

Aside from their own short front, Kirk's Scouts had no idea how the battle was going until the Spanish infantry began to retreat. First a thin trickle of men appeared, followed soon by a demoralized mob. Lockett held his position, his accurate fire adding to the enemy's disorder, until he saw Salcedo trying to re-form his troops behind the abandoned artillery position. Then he ordered a charge, crushing this new resistance before it could form. Jonathan was beside Jess Leeman as they topped the crest of the hill. Here they were joined by Kemper's main force, charging from the other flank. The entire Spanish front had collapsed. The Virginian began to realize the extent of the victory as the pursuit gathered momentum. Here and there desperate knots of men stood and fought futilely, but there was no longer an organized resistance. The slaughter was tremendous.

Salcedo was grim-faced as he rode back into his capital. That night a flag of truce was sent to Kemper's headquarters, established at Mission Concepción. The governor sent an armistice proposal. He was still courageous in his demands. He offered to retire with his troops, surrendering the city, on condition that property rights be respected and the inhabitants unharmed. Otherwise he threatened he would remain and fight to the last man. His communication was addressed to whoever was in charge, without naming any of the leaders. Kemper and Gutierrez knew they held the whip hand. They refused to receive any message not addressed to them properly.

The next morning, March twenty-ninth, McFarland was dispatched into the town under a flag of truce to demand its capitulation. Salcedo still hoped for re-enforcements. He replied that no answer would be possible until the following day. Kemper guessed the reason for this delay and sent McFarland back to tell the governor that unless he surrendered immediately the town would be stormed. To back up his words Kemper

ordered the captured artillery, as well as his own, drawn up in position to command the town. There was no longer any alternative. Salcedo rode out to surrender. With him came Colonel Herrera, a former governor of the province, and other leading officers of his staff.

During the battle of Rosillo, Kemper had promoted Ross to second in command, and Captain Taylor now was in charge of Ross's company, athwart the road approaching San Antonio. Kirk's Scouts were stationed far to the army's right. Dr. Forsythe had ridden out to dress O'Rourke's wound. The Irishman would recover, the doctor said, but he had given an arm to save his friend.

"The tourniquet saved him," the doctor was explaining when Lockett galloped up.

"Salcedo's riding out to surrender," he called, "and I want to be there to see it. Come on, Jonty, or you'll be too late."

"I don't want to miss that either," declared the doctor. "We've been waiting a long time for it." He followed them as they galloped off.

Throughout the army, others followed this same procedure as soon as they realized what was happening. As Kemper hurried up, an orderly followed him at a gallop, carrying the army's flag, the sun bright on its green folds. Kemper towered among his officers, talking to Ross as he watched Salcedo's approach. Don Bernardo Gutierrez was resplendent in a blue and gold uniform, chatting with Salazar. Miguel was saturnine. The door was only beginning to open for him; his goal was still distant.

Captain Taylor had drawn his weather-beaten company to attention on either side of the dusty road when Salcedo arrived. Accompanied by Colonel Herrera, Salcedo dismounted and walked up to Taylor. Salcedo bowed rigidly, drew his sword, presented it to the American, hilt first.

"Not to me," the captain exclaimed. "Colonel Kemper's in command of this army." Turning, he indicated his leader with a sweep of his arm.

The governor sheathed his weapon. Outwardly he remained unruffled, but his lips set in a tighter line. He said nothing, merely nodding to the captain, and then strode on to Kemper.

Once more he bowed and again he tendered his blade in formal surrender. Colonel Kemper smiled pleasantly but his hands remained behind his back. His voice boomed so that all could hear. "General Bernardo Gutierrez is the leader of this expedition. He's the one to accept your surrender, Governor."

Salcedo turned to look at Gutierrez and Salazar who were standing apart. Of all those here, they were the only two he bore personal animosity. In offering Magee terms at La Bahia, his one demand had been that these two rebels be turned over to him. He was a resolute and able man, facing his most trying hour. Heretofore, his face had been set. Now he flushed darkly.

This time he did not sheath his sword. As he stepped before Gutierrez he did not bow, nor did he offer his weapon as he had twice before. Instead, he thrust it into the ground with such force that when he released its hilt, it trembled there.

His eyes measured Gutierrez. They held contempt. "You accept an honor you did not win yourself." His voice was low but the words were distinct and carried well. He bowed with stiff dignity, and then returned to his waiting horse through the silent, watching army. Only the scrape of his boots in the dust disturbed the hush. These men understood and admired the qualities that had made him a worthy opponent. They liked his bearing in defeat.

Teresa was jubilant. From her window she had watched the routed troops pour into the city. Salcedo's might was crushed. Her ambition was one step nearer fulfillment. In her mind everything was arranged now. Only Magee and Gutierrez had stood between Salazar and a throne. Magee's brilliant leadership had been the greatest obstacle, but he was lying in an unmarked grave at La Bahia. She did not know how he had died—there were conflicting rumors—but her instinct told her it had been Salazar's doing. Gutierrez did not trouble her. Salazar could manipulate him. Once his usefulness had ended he would disappear from the scene.

She was sure she had detected the one flaw in his scheme. There were nearly a thousand Americans now, fighting men who had proved their mettle. They might not follow him so readily. Teresa's full lips curved into a smile. Her heart's desire

provided an answer. Let Salazar have his throne. He would share it with her. Once there, her grip on it would be surer than his. She would turn against him his own cunning. She would give the Americans an American to follow, one who had fought with them and shared their hardships.

The guard had been removed from her house and José had no trouble carrying her message through the lines.

Johnny Durst had just arrived from Nacogdoches with supplies. Jonathan told him what had happened. "How's Cissy?"

"Prettier than ever." Durst eyed his friend steadily. "She's a girl in a million, Jonty."

"As if I didn't know. Will she be coming on here now or will you be trying to keep her in Nacogdoches?"

"She'll be here as soon as she hears the war is ended." Durst was still watching Jonathan in that peculiar fixed way when José plucked at Jonty's sleeve.

Jonathan recognized the cross-eyed Mexican at once and stepped aside to question him. "What are you doing here?" he demanded. "Where's your mistress?"

José handed him the letter. He tore it open with tremulous fingers. "My love," it read: "All of our dreams are coming true. I am waiting for you. Come to me now. Your Teresa."

He read it twice, avidly, before he turned again to the messenger. "Take me to her," he commanded impatiently.

Jonathan followed José into town. "Faster," he urged his guide, "faster." Each minute dragged by endlessly, the horses seemed to crawl. The war was ended, Texas was free, and Teresa's love awaited him at the end of this ride.

The sun was in the west. He squinted into its slanting rays and watched as the flag of Spain was lowered from the presidio. Kemper had sent Perry to perform the ceremony. Jonathan watched as the green flag rose slowly in its place and the wind rippled its folds gently.

"Cissy's flag," he thought, and remembered the night she had given it to Magee. That seemed long ago. "It will fly over San Antonio," Magee had promised. Jonathan wished his friend were here to see the prophecy fulfilled.

He spurred his horse.

Chapter 11

Salazar Shows the Way

MARIA ADMITTED Jonathan into a patio that was a cool, green garden and here Teresa was waiting. He saw her thin diaphanous robe trailing from a hammock.

"Teresa!" he called.

She opened drowsy eyes that gladdened at the sight of him. "Jontee!" she answered. "Don't keep me waiting, darling."

Then he was kneeling beside her, holding her in his arms, their lips joined in kisses that tried to span the hunger of all their empty days.

There was no time for words at first.

"Only let me look at you," she said at last, holding him away. Her hands were clinging as she watched, hoping to surprise the desire in his eyes when he looked at her.

He was too troubled by questions to notice the enticing display she had arranged so carefully. When had she left Nacogdoches? How had she come here? He was dismayed to hear that she had been a prisoner.

"Did they treat you well? Were you frightened?"

She laughed. "I knew you would come soon, Jontee. I thought only of that."

He kissed her again. "You were right. All our dreams are coming true. The war is ended and you are in my arms."

She stroked his face and her hand was trembling.

"How soon can we be married?" he demanded. "There's nothing to keep us waiting now."

She lay very still in his arms and avoided his gaze.

"Not yet," she replied softly. "Soon, Jontee, but not yet."

"Why not?"

"First I must win the consent of my guardian," she temporized. "There are many difficulties."

"Miguel Salazar? You know how he feels about me." Jonathan was brusque. "There's no use waiting for his permission. It will never come."

As his arguments intensified, Teresa's mind quickened with the need for excuses. "Still he is my guardian," she murmured. "If I marry without his consent, what will become of my estates?"

"The devil with your property!" Jonathan's impatience would not be denied. "See here, Teresa. You're the reason I came here. You know that. Why should we wait? Why shouldn't I go straight to Don Miguel and tell him I love you? We've nothing to hide."

"But what if he sent me away?" Her terror seemed very real. "If he carried me back to Mexico or some other far-off place, I'd never see you again." She clung to him.

"You aren't a prisoner now," he pointed out.

She nestled closer. "You don't understand these things. In this country a girl can do nothing without her guardian's consent. He controls her estates; he picks the man she'll marry; he can even send her to a convent if he chooses. We aren't in your America."

He scoffed at her objections. "What's to prevent you from coming with me now? We'll find a priest and within an hour you'll be my wife. What can Salazar do then?"

"But we couldn't be married," she protested. "The banns haven't been published. For that, my guardian's consent would be required."

This argument baffled him. If Salazar could close the door of the church against them, what hope was there? His perplexity was in his eyes, and seeing it, her confidence mounted.

"You have quarreled with Don Miguel," she said. "You only know his anger. With me he's different, indulgent as a father."

She held her hand against his lips to still his dissent. "Give me time and I can arrange it."

"I'm not so sure. What if you fail?"

She nestled closer to him. "Then I will come to you anyway," she promised. She ran caressing fingers through his hair. "Only now we must be careful in our meetings. He must not suspect our love—not yet."

This was like the dreams he had had of her, all the lonely months he had been gone, her lips soft against his, her body warming his hands, just as on the night they had parted. He glanced down at her, disturbingly aware of the sheen of flesh through the filmy gown.

Teresa had been waiting for this. She drew him to her tightly. Her lips slipped down from his cheek to his throat. As if to show him the way, she opened his shirt wider at the neck; her kisses nibbled at his shoulder.

"Teresa! Teresa!"

Her breath was crushed out of her at the sudden roughness of his clasp. Just then there was a distant clatter in the house. Maria came running into the garden, her eyes wide with terror. "Dear God!" she moaned, pulling Jonty to his feet. "We are ruined! Don Miguel is at the door."

Teresa gasped.

"You must go out the back gate, Jontee. Maria will show you."

"Why not face him now? I love you, Teresa. I can't leave you like this."

She kissed him swiftly. "Let me handle it. A quarrel now won't win Miguel's consent. Trust me, darling. I know best."

"But when can I see you?"

"Soon," she promised. "I will find a way. Now hurry."

Reluctantly he allowed himself to be whisked through the gate at the rear of the garden. There was time for only one hurried embrace before Teresa shut it behind him.

Miguel Salazar's fury had been blinding when Luiz informed him that Teresa's servant had been in the camp. Teresa here! The suspicion that had been weighting his mind

ever since he discovered Jonathan Kirk still lived gnawed at his temper. He was brusque when Gutierrez asked him to wait.

"We'll make a formal entrance into the city," Don Bernardo promised. "We shall march in with band playing at the head of our troops."

"My business can't wait," Salazar retorted angrily as he sprang into the saddle.

Only Luiz followed him in his precipitous gallop. He had no great difficulty in locating Teresa's house. Her entrance into the city had been spectacular and her presence under guard a matter of much speculation. Her door was quickly pointed out to him.

Maria had heard the bustle in the street in time to warn her mistress. Now she answered the thunder of his knocking with pretended surprise. "Don Miguel!" she exclaimed fervently and fell on her knees before him to kiss his hand. "You've come! At last we're safe!"

As she blocked his path her ears were straining for some sound that would indicate all was well in the garden.

Salazar was not to be duped by such a stratagem. He wrenched his hand free and sent her sprawling with a vicious thrust.

He flung open the door into the patio.

Teresa was there, curled in a hammock, her eyes closed. The solitude of the scene did not lull the suspicion in his darting eyes. He stood there silently scrutinizing each detail to find some telltale flaw.

He approached her softly and gripped her wrist with strong fingers.

She opened her eyes. "Miguel!" she exclaimed. Her smile was warm; her eyes were still lazy with sleep. She would have thrown her arms about him but he still held her wrist.

"Why is your pulse racing, my love?" His tone was impersonal.

Teresa laughed. "You're here and you ask me that?"

His probing eyes still searched her face, but when his hold on her relaxed she was instantly in his arms and her lips

pressed back the questions he might have asked. He buried his face in her shining hair and surrendered to the delight she never failed to stir. This was like old times.

The restraint that had troubled him when they parted at Nacogdoches was gone.

Teresa's ardor lulled his suspicions but they were not dismissed completely.

For her, this was a period of bright hopes and incessant urgings.

"When?" she would ask Miguel constantly. "How soon will we have our throne? What is there to keep us waiting now?"

"Give me time, my love. First, I must get rid of some of these Americans. They don't like the sound of a crown."

"Magee is gone," she reminded him.

"Kemper is just as difficult. Gutierrez is no problem. That's why I have elevated him for the present. Within a week," he promised, "you'll see a change. Everything is arranged."

He would tell her no more despite her pleading, but she trusted his cunning.

It pleased Miguel that Teresa had identified herself with the revolution and he aided in dramatizing the fact that she had been Salcedo's prisoner. He arranged that skillfully. José and Luiz spread their stories of La del Pelo de Oro who had been imprisoned for her allegiance to the republican cause.

The army was flushed with victory, the town rejoiced in the overthrow of its Spanish masters, and the new government was launched with every prospect of success. Miguel Salazar assumed a new prominence, but he was content for the present to manipulate his strings from behind the scene. His first step was to establish himself in a large villa on the outskirts of the town, called La Quinta. It was a large, two-story stone dwelling which, besides the usual patio, had a walled garden terraced down to the river's edge. Here he and Teresa entertained on a scale more lavish than that of the royal governors. Gutierrez came often, as did all captains in the revolutionary army. Kemper and the other American officers were not included in these gatherings, but this was not marked. Salazar's friendships among the Americans were limited. For

the most part Magee's old staff formed a coterie of their own.

Bernardo Gutierrez was given the title of generalissimo and proclaimed governor of the new republic. Serving with him was a junta of thirteen. Salazar was a member of it with the other Mexican officers and a group of the more prominent townsmen. Captain Masicot, a Frenchman, was included but the only American appointed was a man named Hale who had played an inconspicuous role in the army. Some of the officers resented this exclusion but Kemper favored it.

"We're the army," he counseled. "It's best we stay out of the council. It would look too much like a military dictatorship."

Kemper devoted himself to his troops. From the confiscated royal treasury, each man received his wages and a bonus of fifteen dollars, with a suit of clothes and an order for two horses or mules out of the public *caballado*. He also made arrangements to set up an office for filing land claims. Kemper wanted his soldiers converted into settlers, and Gutierrez sympathized.

The surrendered troops were permitted to return home to Mexico after laying down their arms, but the officers, including Governor Salcedo and his staff, were detained on parole. That they were given the liberty of the town rankled with Salazar.

"I haven't forgotten the way the governor insulted you at the surrender," he reminded Gutierrez. "I remember how he refused to yield his sword to you."

"I haven't forgotten either," Don Bernardo growled.

"Texas will never be really free until we're rid of him," continued Miguel. "His presence here just invites trouble. Sooner or later he'll head an uprising."

"But he's given his word of honor," Gutierrez protested.

"I still recall his contempt for you." Always Salazar harped on that theme. "And I remember his terms at La Bahia. He offered everyone a safe conduct across the border except you and me. Ah, I have no doubts concerning his regard for us, my friend. He's made it very plain. Sooner or later he'll cut your throat."

Salazar discussed the same subject with Captain Antonio Delgado. "It angers me to see these haughty *gachupines* walk-

ing our streets. I've no illusions about the treatment we would have received if we had been taken prisoners. Your father had that misfortune. What befell him?"

"Need you ask?" Delgado's face was contorted. "They set his head on a pole as an example to all who defied the king."

"A very distinguished gentleman." Miguel shook his head sadly. "That's the fate which awaited us had we lost. I do not delude myself. Should the fortunes of war ever turn against us, our heads will decorate the town. And yet we must watch in silence while these *gachupines* insult us with their arrogance. It's unbearable."

The new council met on April first.

"It is of first importance that we determine the disposition of the royal prisoners," Gutierrez announced after calling the meeting to order. "The safety of our new government demands that their liberty be curtailed. We cannot permit this freedom."

"Bring them to trial," Captain Delgado was the first to demand. "My father's only crime was that he opposed their government. Let these men suffer the same fate."

"This is impossible." Captain Masicot was on his feet immediately. "We accepted their parole. We pledged our words for their safety."

"I pledged nothing," Delgado protested.

"No one asked me," Menchaca objected.

"Bring them to trial! Bring them to trial!" the others chorused.

"Let us not be too hasty." Miguel Salazar's voice was suave. "Of course there can be no doubt of the fate in store for us should we fall into royalist hands. There isn't a man in this room who wouldn't be beheaded instantly. Salcedo is both arrogant and ruthless. He would not hesitate to condemn us."

A mutter went around the council table.

"And yet—" Salazar appeared not to notice it; his voice purred softly on—"I sympathize with Captain Masicot's view. Let's not be hasty, no matter how dangerous these men may be."

"Vote," Menchaca demanded angrily.

"Bring them to trial," shouted Delgado.

The vote stood ten to two. Only Masicot and Hale voted against it. Salazar did not vote.

Masicot informed Kemper immediately, and he hurried to the governor's palace in search of Gutierrez. With him came Ross, Perry, Lockett, Gaines and Jonathan Kirk.

"What's this I hear about a trial?" he growled angrily, thumping the table. "You were present when we agreed to parole Salcedo and his officers. You understood the terms."

"It was the vote of the junta," Gutierrez shrugged. "If you have a protest to make, you should appear before it."

"You're the governor and your word is pledged for the safety of these men, just as mine is. I'm not going to appear before anyone. I've come to warn you. These men are not going on trial and if anyone attempts it I'll march in here at the head of my men and set them free. Do I make myself clear?"

The new governor hesitated. He was not lacking in courage but the angry officers surrounding him represented the bulk of his army. "Have you any doubt what your fate would be if you were at their mercy?" he asked.

"I'd accept Salcedo's word any time," Kemper rejoined bluntly. "He accepted mine and I intend to see that it's kept."

"I don't like the temper of the junta," Gutierrez temporized. "What would you think of sending the prisoners to New Orleans? That would remove them from the council's reach and your pledge for their safety would be vindicated."

"How could they be sent?"

"There are two ships loading for New Orleans at Matagorda Bay right now," replied the governor. "I could send them there under guard. As a matter of fact—" he shrugged—"I'll feel better when they're gone. It's a situation fraught with trouble."

"Maybe that would be best." Kemper wanted to avoid a clash with the council if possible.

"The ships will sail within a week." Don Bernardo showed his relief. He smiled affably. "I can keep the junta in hand that long."

"I'll hold you responsible for that," declared Kemper.

Gutierrez was troubled by Kemper's resolute attitude toward the prisoners. He carried his worries to Salazar.

"The Americans will not tolerate a breach of the parole," he declared. "Salcedo can't be brought to trial before the junta."

"Kemper?"

"Yes. He threatens to march in at the head of his troops and rescue them if we attempt it. If we start fighting among ourselves, it's the end of our republic. But I have a solution." The governor shrugged. "I'll send them to New Orleans for safekeeping. At least we'll be rid of them here."

"Salcedo is a dangerous enemy—" Miguel settled back in his chair comfortably—"and we both know his hatred for you. Leniency ceases to be a virtue when it's rash. For your sake I'm sorry it has turned out this way."

Gutierrez paced the floor. "What can I do? Shall I get rid of one enemy only to make another? Kemper doesn't make idle threats. The Americans will follow him."

"I'll be glad when we're free of Kemper and his kind," retorted Salazar impatiently. "They've served their purpose. Now if I were governor—" he spaced his words slowly—"I'd find a way to arrange this. I'd never let a man as dangerous as Salcedo slip through my fingers. Kemper wouldn't worry me too much.

"Sooner or later he'd hear of it, of course, but by then it would be too late for him to interfere." He smiled. "Who knows? He might even go back across the border where he belongs when he discovers the difference between our ways and his. Yes," he mused aloud, "that's probably what he'd do, and I can't say I'd regret his departure."

Gutierrez had stopped his restless pacing. "If this could be accomplished without open conflict," he began doubtfully, "it would solve my problems. How could it be done?"

Miguel's fingers drummed on his chair arm. "You suggested the plan yourself," he replied finally. "Kemper is satisfied with your order for the deportation of the prisoners. I think Antonio Delgado would be an ideal man to escort them to Matagorda. Like you and me, he has no love for these *gachupines*. We could depend upon him to carry out any instructions."

Don Bernardo pondered the advice in silence. "Who would give Delgado his orders?" he asked presently.

"You're the governor," his friend pointed out. "However, I know him well. I would undertake to emphasize them properly if they were ambiguous."

Kemper was present at the governor's palace when Gutierrez issued the order canceling the paroles. It directed that the prisoners be taken under guard to Matagorda Bay where they would board ship for New Orleans.

There were fourteen prisoners: Governor Manuel de Salcedo of Texas; Colonel Simon de Herrera, governor of Nueva Leon; Lieutenant Colonel Geronimo Herrera; Captain Juan de Echeverria; Captain Juan Ignacio Arambido; Captain Miguel de Arcos and his two sons, Luis and Francisco, one a lieutenant, the other an ensign; Lieutenants Gregorio Amado and Juan Caso; and four citizens known for their royalist sympathies, the most prominent being Antonio Lopez and Francisco Cordero, a nephew of the governor of Coahuilla. The captives were assembled in the long dining room of the governor's palace under guard. Salcedo asked to see Kemper.

"I have your word that my officers are to be treated as prisoners of war," he reminded the colonel. "Parole was binding on both parties, yet you find us captives here. What is the meaning of it?"

Kemper reassured him. "You're being given safe conduct to New Orleans. Once aboard ship, you'll be released."

"Whose idea was this?" Salcedo demanded.

"Don Bernardo thought it best in order to avoid any conflict with the junta," the American explained. "They voted to bring you and your officers to trial, but we could not tolerate any such procedure."

"Gutierrez!" the royal governor exclaimed. "I thought so. Let me remind you, sir, that it was you who routed my army. I consider myself *your* prisoner."

"You have my assurance that there will be no trial." Kemper turned away, irritated by the implied rebuke. "I think Don Bernardo has made a wise decision."

Captain Antonio Delgado was Salazar's only guest that night. Miguel was genial and Teresa's spirit as effervescent as the wine which was constantly replenished in the captain's goblet.

"To a day of reckoning!" Miguel proposed the toast. "Those that live by the sword shall perish by the sword."

Delgado drained his glass.

"You should be a happy man, knowing that your father's death so soon will be avenged and that you can witness it." Salazar smiled.

Luiz was attending them.

His chubby hand shook so that the wine bottle chattered against an empty tumbler.

"I haven't forgotten my father," the young officer promised darkly. "The *gachupines* can expect the same mercy they showed him."

After the guest left Miguel threw off his restraint. "A very satisfactory way to settle an old score," he said, clasping Teresa to him. "Our day approaches, my love."

She frowned. "You avenge yourself upon Salcedo. I don't blame you for that. But haven't we greater plans?"

He tilted her unruly head toward the light and studied it. Then he threw himself back in the chair and laughed. "I thought you guessed my design. The time of waiting is over. I'm beginning to abandon the tools which have grown useless. By permitting this vengeance, Gutierrez has ruined himself. The Americans will depose him, and—" he grew sober—"if I am fortunate in my handling of this, we'll dispose of some troublesome Americans, too."

He kissed her fingers. "Can you already feel the weight of a scepter in these pretty hands?"

Teresa twined her arms about him.

It lacked an hour of dawn when Delgado started the prisoners for Matagorda Bay. There were twenty in his company, all native volunteers. His lieutenant, Pedro Teran, was picked for his hatred of the *gachupines*, and he had made sure that each man shared this antipathy. Governor Salcedo objected to the prisoners' feet being lashed together under their horses' bellies, but the captain only shrugged.

"I've seen how prisoners were bound when they were brought before Your Excellency," he mocked. "Colonel Herrera will remember how my father was treated, and consider himself lucky."

The royal governor was not dressed for a journey, but ar-

rayed in full-dress uniform. Herrera had followed his example. The two men rode knee to knee as the cavalcade passed through the narrow streets and turned south on the road to La Bahia. The guards began jesting noisily among themselves. The captives rode in silence.

Not more than ten minutes out of town, Delgado deserted the road, turning sharply right to where trees, dark against the sky, outlined the river's course. Here was a ford on the road to the missions. Delgado called a halt before the journey was fairly begun.

"Is this the road to Matagorda?" Salcedo demanded.

"It's the nearest you'll ever come to it," the captain replied.

The prisoners were removed from their horses one at a time and bound securely. "Prop them against the trees," Delgado ordered, "where they may watch. It suits me that they should know our plans."

Morning was close; its creeping gray matched the mist that veiled the river. At a word from their leader the guards drew their machetes.

"Some sharpen their knives with a stone," Delgado remarked, "but I think there's nothing like leather to give them an edge." Slowly he whetted the weapon against his boot sole.

The guards chuckled among themselves and followed his example. "His Excellency has a soft throat," said Pedro Teran. "May I test it, Captain?"

"I care not," was the reply. "Herrera is the man for me." He grinned across at the helpless colonel. "I don't want my blade too sharp. I want you to feel it as it saws through the gristle. Maybe it will remind you of my father. Remember how you had his head thrust on a pole? You may be sure I've reserved the same honor for you."

"Let's get on with it," growled one of the guards. "I don't even like the sound of their *gachupine* voices."

Delgado glanced eastward. "I'm waiting for the sun," he said. "I intend to enjoy this morning's sight and we'll need light to see it all."

"This is cold-blooded murder," one of the civilian prisoners whimpered.

"Quiet!" Salcedo commanded sternly. "They want to hear

you snivel." Then he continued in a gentler tone, "There's only one hope left us, gentlemen: that we may die like men."

Delgado set the stage with care. The four civilians came first. Dragged to the water's edge, they were stripped of their clothing and stood shivering in the wan morning, as their captors argued. "This one's mine," cried a guard, slapping Antonio Lopez across the thigh with the flat of his machete. "By all rights, Captain, each of us should claim the clothes of his victim."

"We'll draw lots for it," said Delgado. "And each man may keep his victim's possessions."

The lottery proceeded noisily while the stripped captives waited. Once the winners were decided, they led their prizes into midstream. The ford was shallow, scarcely knee-deep. The risen sun already flirted with the ripples that followed their splashing progress.

"Watch," Delgado advised the remaining prisoners, "and remember your time's coming." Then he gave the signal and the butchery began. As each throat was slashed, gushing blood painted the body of the murdered man, but by the time he was dragged ashore the swift water had cleansed him again.

The place of honor and special hatred was reserved for Salcedo and Simon de Herrera, governors of states.

"A very fine uniform, Colonel," Delgado commented as Herrera was being stripped. "It will fit me nicely."

Herrera stared at him coldly. "It will take more than gold epaulettes to make a soldier of you," he said.

Delgado's eyes narrowed. He tested his blade with his thumb. "For that insult," he declared, "I have fined you two ears. Your head will be hard to recognize when it's placed on a stake."

Herrera made no reply, nor did Salcedo speak when Teran taunted him. Side by side they marched into the water. The last act of the grisly business was completed.

Chapter 12

Aftermath of a Massacre

JONATHAN KIRK and his companions were returning to San Antonio that April morning after five days in territory forty miles to the south, where they had staked out homesteads for themselves and friends such as the Marstens. They had chosen the mission road and had camped on the way because these lands had been under irrigation for a hundred years, and Jonathan wanted to inspect the dam and ditches. This slowed their progress and it was mid-morning before they turned their horses into the shallow sparkling ford.

"Good God! Injuns!" Giles Brady exclaimed, checking his horse and pointing across the stream at the litter of bodies half concealed in the tall grass.

All were inclined to agree until they got a better look at the bodies. None was scalped.

"Look, ain't this the royal governor?" Jess Leeman called suddenly.

Jonathan knelt beside the sprawled form, stunned by the sinister gash which almost severed head from shoulders. It was Salcedo. Others lay in grotesque attitudes just as they had been abandoned, their arms still bound behind their backs.

"Who done dis, Mist' Jonty?" Gabe demanded. "Whoever done it, dey ain't *men*."

"They spent some time hyar," Giles announced, "but it warn't a camp. Thar's been too many hosses on this trail for me to read it good, but the damned murderers rode right back to town."

"I'll go straight to Kemper," Jonathan decided aloud. "The rest of you stay here and see that nothing is disturbed. I want him to see this for himself."

Between them they were able to identify most of the corpses.

When Kemper arrived, he paced the river bank restlessly, peering into the face of each victim. He would not permit the ropes which still bound them to be removed.

"I want everyone to see how the crime was committed," he growled. "Take them to the Plaza de Las Yslas," he commanded, "and I'll have a guard there for them." He turned to the officers who had accompanied him. "We'll hold a staff meeting in my quarters immediately," he said.

Nine were present at the meeting. Kemper was at the head of the table. Perry sat at his right, pulling thoughtfully at his ear. Jonathan was there beside Captain Lockett. Ross, Gaines and Taylor were seated on one side. The other two were the Frenchman, Masicot, and his countryman, Despallier.

"I didn't invite any Mexican officers because I don't know which may be involved," Kemper explained. "Gutierrez gave the order for the removal of the prisoners himself." He described his interview with the governor the day before. "This mess stinks to the sky," he continued. "Gutierrez and whoever else is responsible for it should be hanged."

"Menchaca's troops are under arms in the presidio," Despallier declared. "We can't move against Gutierrez without provoking an open battle."

"Let 'em fight. We'll teach 'em a lesson," Kemper growled.

"Yes, we can whip them but it won't be easy." Lockett spoke deliberately. "It's what happens afterward that bothers me. How can we hold out against the royalists if the whole country turns against us? We can defeat one side or the other but what chance have we against both? We're too few and we're hundreds of miles from the border. How many of our men will we be able to lead back?"

Kemper glared. "You're right," he conceded at last. "I've no right to throw away an army. Damn hyenas! What's the good of conquering a country that whelps such curs? I don't know how the rest of you feel, but as for me, I'm through with the whole rotten affair. If I wasn't responsible for the army, I'd hold a public hanging before I leave."

"Wouldn't we accomplish more if we stayed here and cleaned up the mess some other way?" asked Ross.

"What are you going to do? Execute the whole native popu-

lation?" Lockett sided with his commander.

"My mind's made up," Kemper declared with finality. "I'm going back home and fight the British. From all accounts, General Harrison needs fighting men. Each of you is free to do as he pleases and the men in the army must get the same choice. I'm going to put it up to them. Assemble all companies in one hour and march them to the plaza. Let them see the victims first."

When Gutierrez heard that the Americans were marching into the town, he was panic-stricken. Menchaca's native company was assembled in the presidio, and he ordered the gates closed and the guns commanding the plaza manned.

"You've nothing to fear," Salazar commented. "Kemper isn't such a fool as to put his forces right in our line of fire if he wants to make trouble." He clapped Menchaca on the shoulder. "Here's the best officer of them all. I put my trust in him. If the Americans make a move toward the gate, he'll cut them down. They've placed themselves in a trap."

"Then what is he planning?" Gutierrez asked anxiously.

"I hope he's planning to leave here," Miguel answered. "And the more men he takes with him, the better I'll be pleased."

"And leave us without an army?"

"We have Menchaca and a strong native force now."

Kemper addressed his men, telling what had happened. Then he marched each company past the mutilated corpses.

"I'm going back home," he told them all. "I'll have no more truck with murderers. Any of you who want to come along are welcome. Some of your officers are going to stay and try to straighten out the mess. I'm moving to the mission across the river, and any man who wants to go with me can report there. We'll leave in the morning. Those who decide to stay should report to Major Ross."

He left a bewildered force behind him as he rode away.

Cecily Marsten arrived when affairs were at this crisis.

"Look, there's your flag, Cissy." Cris pointed at the green banner floating over the presidio as they rode into the town. They had no inkling of the trouble until they arrived at the house where the company made its headquarters. Cris halted

the wagon, piled high with the familiar furniture.

Jonathan threw his arms around her. "This is going to be like old times, Cissy." He gave her a hug which left her breathless. "Wait till you see the land we've picked out. Your place is right across the river from mine." He gave the others a warning glance. He didn't want her greeted with bad news.

She wanted to know more about the settlement.

Her father hesitated. "Maybe there won't be any after all, Cissy." He told her what had happened. "We're just talking things over, trying to decide what to do."

Cecily turned to Jonathan. "What have you decided?"

There had been no question in his mind. He was as revolted by the butchery as Kemper had been, but Teresa was here.

"I'm staying," he replied. "With you it's different. Perhaps you should go back, Cissy."

"Why?"

"You're a woman. This—well, it's a savage country."

"And you think I'm afraid?" She was rebellious. "You won't get rid of me as easily as that. In a way I'm glad this happened. Now, whatever you do, whatever we build here, it will be partly mine."

Of the officers, only Lockett and Despallier threw in their lot with Kemper; the men in the ranks were about equally divided. While Kemper had his troops massed in the town its doors remained closed and Gutierrez prudently held Menchaca's force in the presidio. After he crossed the river, however, curious throngs began to clutter the the streets.

Jess Leeman sought out Jonathan. "How about takin' a walk, Jonty?" he queried. "It's beginnin' to look like a holiday over thar. I can't figger out what's goin' on."

Together they crossed the river, jostling their way through crowds that grew more dense as they approached the main plaza.

"See yonder. That's what I mean." Jess pointed toward a wine cask, propped on squat trestles. A fat Mexican passed battered cups to the reaching hands that encircled him.

"*Vino*," the man at the cask was calling. "*Vino* for everyone. Just hold your cups, señors."

The Virginian elbowed his way forward.

"Here's an *americano* wants to drink with us," someone called. "Give him a mug, *amigo*."

The fellow turned from his cask. Jonathan peered across a dozen intervening shoulders and recognized Luiz, but by the time he had crowded to a place beside the spigot, the servant's lumpish figure had vanished.

"Who's in charge here?" he demanded.

No one knew. "It's free, señor. Just help yourself."

There were other casks dispensing wine, one at each corner of the plaza. They visited each place and asked many questions but could find no one to answer them. At the fourth, Jonathan glimpsed another familiar figure. There was no mistaking the vender's twisted glance. It was José.

The Virginian worked his way to the cask.

"Who sent you here?" he demanded.

The servant smiled in recognition.

"Señor Jontee! Will you have wine?"

"Whose wine is it?"

"Everybody's, señor. It is free."

"Yes, but who's furnishing it? Someone's paying the bill."

"*Quien sabe?* Why ask, if it is free?"

Jonathan tried another tack. "Who sent you here, José?"

The Mexican grinned. "I don't have to be sent to a fiesta, señor."

"Did Teresa tell you to come?"

José shrugged. "If you tell her about me, she will understand. It isn't every day a poor man can drink his fill without emptying his pockets."

Jonathan found no answer to his question. "If I could find out who's being so generous, maybe this would make sense," he told Jess.

He didn't tell him the suspicion that was forming in his mind. Luiz and José had served at two of the casks. Both were from the same household.

At dusk the mutilated bodies of the massacred men were removed to a near-by house, ostensibly in preparation for their funeral. As still more wine was opened, the crowds grew boisterous. Presently torches began to appear. A hoarse voice rasped

out a baudy chorus and the refrain was picked up by a hundred throats. A procession started to form. Soon hundreds staggered along in it. The remaining Americans clustered here and there, watching the frenzy. Jonathan stood in one of these groups with Jess Leeman and Giles Brady.

"My God! Look there!" Jess Leeman pointed toward the top of the column.

From somewhere long poles had appeared and each was tipped with a grisly object that Jonathan could not make out at first. Then as the torches flared, he saw with loathing that it was a human head!

To the Americans, the ferocity of the wanton celebration and the mutilation of the massacre victims were as revolting as the original crime. All through the night men went over to Kemper's ranks at the mission east of the river. Even Ross changed his mind, and joined Kemper. McFarland, Gaines, Taylor and Perry would not leave, but Lockett and Despallier joined Kemper. Only a hundred and fifty Americans remained in San Antonio.

Miguel was exuberant when he told Teresa the news. "The Americans are leaving this morning," he gloated. "All but a handful, not enough to challenge Menchaca's authority. This is just the beginning, Teresa. Things will move fast now."

With the strong American force gone, little remained to check Salazar's ambitions. She grasped the significance of the news but fear took the edge off her triumph. What of Jonathan? Would he turn back with Kemper? It was unthinkable. She must see him—quickly.

"Why don't you say something?" he demanded.

"I guess I'm dazed." She forced a smile to her lips. "I've been dreaming of this for so long, it's hard to realize it's actually happened."

Miguel laughed. "I don't wonder you're stunned. It's unbelievable, how everything's turned out just as I planned it. Even that brawl last night! It couldn't have gone off better if I'd made them rehearse it."

"Everything is settled, then?" She still wore that set smile.

"Almost. The rest will be simple but it will take some han-

dling. I'll be busy the rest of the day." He kissed her hand with exaggerated courtesy. "Your Majesty," he said, and burst into roars of laughter as he hurried away.

As soon as he was gone Teresa ordered out the Yellow Pumpkin.

"You know where El Rubio lives?" she asked José. "Take me there—and hurry."

Cris came grinning into the room. "Come to the door quick, Cissy. I'll show you one of the sights of the town."

They all looked up curiously.

Cecily was in the back. "I can't come now. I've got my hands in the bread dough. What is it?"

"Hang your hands! Come look! It's that woman in the God-awful yellow coach. I wonder where she ever got hold of such a thing?"

"Oh, I've seen *her.*" His sister emerged from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. She frowned. "Come in the house and shut the door. I'll not have you gawking at such a woman!"

Jonathan had taken no offense at Cris's remark. He felt the same way about the grotesque coach. This was different. His face burned red.

"The lady is Don Miguel Salazar's ward," he broke in hotly. "You don't know what you're saying. She's a friend of mine."

The carriage had stopped outside. There was a rap at the door.

Cecily looked at him in astonishment. "So I see," she retorted stiffly and walked out of the room.

Jonathan looked at the glittering coach with more distaste than ever when he went to Teresa. "I wish you wouldn't ride in this thing," he told her abruptly.

"Why not? I think it's beautiful."

"It's in bad taste."

Teresa lifted her chin proudly. "It might belong to a queen."

"Not here! Your head's still filled with that royal nonsense." Memory of Cecily's words made his protest more emphatic. "When we're married, that's the first thing that's going on the junk heap."

"And I suppose I'll have nothing to say about it?"

"Don't you understand, Teresa? It gives people the wrong impression of you. It makes you look like—like—"

"Say it," she commanded.

"Like a kept woman!"

Teresa stared at him in angry silence.

He wished there were some way he might recall the words. "I'm sorry," he said finally. "But it's an awful coach."

"And it makes me look like a trollop," she added harshly.

"No. Nothing could make you look different, Teresa. Not to me."

It seemed to Teresa then that her day had been spent in concealing her thoughts from those about her. First Miguel, when she had been harried by the thought of Jontee's leaving; now the man she loved, who must not guess her present bitterness. She felt tired.

"No matter." She turned to her errand. "I had to see you. I heard the Americans were leaving."

"Not all. I'm staying."

"I had to know, Jontee. I couldn't bear it if you left."

"And yet you keep putting me off, keep me waiting." He voiced his growing impatience. "What's the point of it? I might as well be leaving. I never get to see you."

She smiled then. He was hers, still. "It won't be much longer," she promised. "Just a few more days—a week perhaps. Give me one more week, Jontee. If our path isn't smoothed by then, I'll come to you anyway."

Gutierrez came to Miguel for advice. "The American officers have demanded an interview," he explained. "They want Delgado and his company of guards arrested and brought to trial."

"What American officers?" Salazar asked.

"Perry was their spokesman."

"And it was a demand?" Miguel shrugged. "They could afford to be insolent when they were backed by eight hundred troops. It's different now. This has become our government, Don Bernardo, not theirs."

Still the governor hesitated. "Their army was only a hun-

dred and fifty strong when it first crossed the Texas border. Such men are not to be despised."

"Then they were led by Magee. He's dead and Kemper's gone. Today we have an army of our own. If you want my opinion, I suggest that this is the time to deal firmly with these men. Handle them properly and they'll make you good troops; once you permit them to dictate your policies, the government will be theirs, not yours." Miguel shook his head. "No, my friend, this is no time to temporize. This is the time to be resolute."

He smiled to himself as Gutierrez hurried away.

In reply to the demand of the American officers, Gutierrez declared that he would refer the matter to the next meeting of the junta, the properly constituted authority, and that any action deemed necessary would be taken by that body. Perry called a meeting of the officers. Captains Menchaca and Sava were included in the invitation. Menchaca went to his good friend Salazar for advice.

"By all means attend," Miguel suggested. "The crime should be avenged. That is the proper way. I'm anxious for you to have a part in this, Captain. You will be one of the leaders of the new nation. I see this very clearly even if Gutierrez doesn't."

There were eight officers on the board. Perry, elected a major to succeed the absent Kemper, presided. Jonathan was a member with Gaines, McFarland and Taylor. Captain Masicot was present, and Menchaca and Sava represented the native troops. In order to avoid the appearance of factional conflict, Delgado was arrested by Gaines's company of native Nacogdochens. Gutierrez immediately called a meeting of the junta, which the officers refused to attend. Delgado's release was demanded but the military board ignored it and proceeded with preparations for the trial. The governor then sent for Menchaca but without success.

Instead, that officer went to Salazar who suggested his course of action.

"I'm a soldier, señors," was Delgado's defense. "I only obeyed orders."

"Whose orders?" Perry demanded.

"Don Bernardo Gutierrez is the governor," the accused officer replied. "The executions were carried out by his authority."

"Then Gutierrez is the one we should try," exclaimed Gaines angrily.

When Don Bernardo ignored the court's summons, Taylor went after him with a company. They found him in the governor's palace.

"This is an outrage," Gutierrez exclaimed. "I am generalissimo of the army and head of the government. When officers question their superior, it's mutiny." He rattled the desk before him with his plump fist.

"Worse things than mutiny have been going on here. I have orders to bring you before the court on a charge of murder."

"I'll not come."

Taylor turned to his men. "Bring him along," he ordered gruffly.

Rough hands seized the protesting governor. "Mutiny!" he bawled at the top of his lungs. "Menchaca! Delgado!" He called in vain for the native officers. When he realized that nothing could spare him this ignominy, he made an effort to salvage his dignity.

"Tell them to take their hands off me," he pleaded. "I'll not be dragged through the streets like a burro. Remember, I'm the governor. I give you my word I'll appear before the board."

"Your word!" the captain scoffed. "You'll come now if we have to drag you by the heels."

The governor marched to his trial between two files of determined men. His face was scarlet but his bearing haughty as he trudged the dusty street.

At first he arrogantly denied their right to try him, but he was unnerved by the presence of Menchaca and Sava on the tribunal. Masicot, his best friend there, sat grimly among his accusers.

"It was Delgado," was his next defense. "The man exceeded his authority."

"Bring in Delgado," was Perry's blunt reply to this.

"It was by your order, Excellency," the frightened executioner exclaimed when he was brought in.

"It's his word against mine then." The governor took a high tone.

"I'd have more confidence in your word if you had taken some action against Delgado after you learned what had happened," Perry retorted. "When we demanded that he be brought to trial, you put us off by declaring it a matter for the junta to handle. It seems to me that you'd have wanted him tried if he'd committed the atrocity on his own responsibility."

Don Bernardo sensed the telling effect of this argument. He glanced swiftly around the room and read no mercy in these stern faces. His arrogance faded. "It was my compassion for Antonio Delgado," he explained. "I could not find it in my heart to blame him. His father was beheaded by Herrera's order. Is there anyone here who would not avenge his own father?"

"And you knew this?" It was Masicot who asked.

"Of course. All men knew it."

"You damn yourself," Perry exclaimed impatiently. "You entrusted the prisoners to this man, knowing how he felt. After the crime was discovered you took no steps to avenge it." He turned to his fellow officers. "I'm satisfied we have the straight of this now. Are there further questions?"

"This has been hard for me to believe, Don Bernardo," said Masicot. "I have known you as a gentleman of high principle. And yet when you failed to punish Delgado's act, you condoned it."

"I've explained that," the governor pleaded. "My kindliness betrayed me."

The officers were of one opinion. They had no doubt of Gutierrez' guilt. Some favored his execution, others a more temperate course. Masicot was one of the latter.

"There's been enough bloodshed," he argued. "The land's red with it. For once, let's demonstrate that we can depose a leader without it."

Gutierrez was declared guilty of complicity in the crime and removed from office. Delgado was relieved of his command. Pedro Teran and the others present at the executions were banished from the colony. The junta was dissolved. The officers had lost all confidence in it.

Perry ordered that the massacre victims be buried with military honors. All troops, both Mexican and American, were massed on the Plaza de Las Yslas for the ceremony.

Don Bernardo again turned to Miguel Salazar for advice. "What's to become of our new nation with all its leaders gone?" he questioned. "The men with the capacity to govern are disappearing one by one. Magee is dead, Kemper is gone and now I—" he tapped his chest dramatically—"I, the natural leader, am deposed. Only ruin and anarchy can follow."

"It's unfortunate, Bernardo, but at least you have your life," was the cool retort. "If I were in your place, I'd make for the American border."

Chapter 13

Don Miguel Exposes His Hand

MIGUEL HAD two guests at his table at La Quinta. There was one empty chair. "I had hoped that Captain Delgado would join us, but he's been detained," Salazar explained. "However, I have his assurance he'll stand with us in any action we take for the benefit of the colony."

"Good man," Menchaca grunted. "A real soldier. Nothing chickenhearted about him. That's been the trouble here, too many yellow-livered gentlemen and not enough red-blooded men." He had the swart face of an Indian. His scowl was truculent and his voice loud, as he thought fitting to a man of growing importance.

"For my part I'm glad we're rid of the *americanos,*" Salazar replied. "What has been the result of their interference? We overthrew tyranny; now we have anarchy. They deposed Gutierrez and offer nothing in his place."

"Don Bernardo is still here," Captain Sava volunteered. He was a slender man, more Spanish than Indian in type, and older, his hair beginning to frost at the temples. He was tight-lipped, with large eyes that burned with zealous fire. "Why not restore him as governor? There aren't enough *americanos* left to oppose us."

Salazar appeared to study this proposal. Finally he shook his head in seeming reluctance. "I'm sorry. Bernardo is my friend, but he hasn't the strength we need and he's too much under the influence of the foreigners. Only consider. He allowed himself to be deposed when an aggressive man would have defied them." He glanced at his companions. "We would have stood by him if he had shown such character. And there's one thing I can't forgive," he continued. "He did not support Delgado after the executions. How can a leader expect loyalty from his

friends unless he shows them the same faithfulness?"

Menchaca's fist rattled the dishes. "We don't want Gutierrez."

Salazar agreed. "And yet we must choose someone. The *americanos* I distrust. This is our land and I want no alien ruling it." His scrutiny was on Sava now. "I've asked you here to discuss these things because you're the leaders in whom I have greatest confidence. If we act together now, we can build a strong government. There are rich rewards ahead for the men who accomplish this. Wealth—power—honor! I see a prosperous nation here, but it takes planning. We've already felt the disastrous result of incompetence and weak wills." He shrugged. "It's either real rulers or ruin now. Which is your choice?"

Menchaca's eyes had turned into slits of cunning. "A strong man would be needed to head our army," he suggested. "Do you have anyone in mind?"

Salazar's smile was disarming. "I have a very strong man in mind," he replied. "His name is Menchaca." Then turning to Sava, he continued, "A minister of finance would be needed. It has occurred to me that you are ideally fitted for this important post, my friend. Of course, first we must find the chief, and we must make sure he is one who won't forget his friends."

"I'd trust you," declared Menchaca bluntly. "You're my friend. Why should I support someone I don't know and who might not appreciate me?"

"Minister of finance," Sava tested the title on his tongue. "I think I'd like that. I agree with Menchaca. Who else but you could be our leader?"

"Well, think it over, gentlemen," he suggested. "Tomorrow night we'll meet here again, to determine our action."

Luiz had not neglected his opportunities. He had long been aware of his master's interest in Jonathan Kirk, and he had made it his business to scrape up an acquaintance with Pablo Savias, of Kirk's Scouts. Through him he had learned of the settlement planned along the river, and he had kept Salazar informed. Tonight, his piggish eyes were gleaming with excitement as he sidled into the room.

"I have news, Excellency. You can judge of its worth yourself. It's about the *americano* scout, Jonathan Kirk."

Salazar's lids narrowed. "What are you trying to tell me?"

Luiz moved a step nearer the door. "He leaves at dawn for a trip down the river. There will be only nine in the party and one of them is the Marsten girl."

Miguel had noted the servant's cautious retreat toward the door. The fellow was ready for flight. "That isn't all you came to tell me." His voice lashed out abruptly. "Let's have the rest of it."

Luiz gulped. "Señorita Teresa—" He hesitated.

"Well?"

"Today she visited his house in La Villita. I have seen them together before."

"You're slow in telling me," his master retorted. His hands tightened until the knuckles gleamed white in the candlelight.

"She didn't go to his house before, señor. There was little to tell until today."

Miguel sat motionless, his brows knotted in thought. The servant shifted his weight from one foot to the other, uneasily.

"I came straight to you—" he began.

Salazar stopped him with a gesture. "I'm expecting a visitor," he said. "Pedro Teran. When he comes, bring him in here."

"Yes, señor."

Teran the executioner, Salazar mused when he was alone. Well, why not? News of such an atrocity would ring from one end of Texas to the other.

Lieutenant Pedro Teran's visits had been infrequent in San Antonio since the furor created by the assassinations. As Delgado's second in command, he had been banished and he risked the journey only at night. This was not his first call at La Quinta, and his pockets were heavy with silver after each interview.

"You sent for me, Excellency?"

Miguel's fingers ceased their drumming. "I need a man," he began quietly, "a man both brave and ambitious. Brave, because there's some danger in the job, ambitious because riches and honor will be his reward."

Teran moistened his lips. "How can a man earn these things, Don Miguel?"

Salazar poured out two tumblers of wine. "Sit down," he invited. "A thing of this sort requires understanding. Tomorrow some *americanos* ride down the river. Their destination is the land beyond the Flores plantations. There will be eight men and a woman in the party." His tone grew more casual as he shoved the red tumbler toward his guest. "It would require at least twenty men and a skillful ambush, Lieutenant. None of them must come back."

Teran thrust back his glass. "It was an affair like this that ruined me," he said.

"If there are no survivors, who will there be to accuse you?" Salazar smiled and his voice was smooth. "This time the reward is greater than silver, although there will be plenty of that. There's more at stake than you know. In a few days there will be a new government here. I will be the one who names its officers and I shan't forget my friends. It would be nice to walk the streets of San Antonio again, *amigo.* And if you were again an officer of the army . . ." His shrewd eyes were calculating the expression on the visitor's face.

Teran gulped of his wine. "Who will be in this company, Excellency?"

"Jonathan Kirk and his scouts. I warned you it would have to be a skillful ambush."

"And the girl?"

"She is an *americano,* too, and young—but remember there must be no survivors."

The lieutenant drank again, this time sipping slowly. "I have the twenty men who were banished," he mused. "Would they be welcomed back too?"

"As you please," Miguel agreed. "When you are once more an officer, you may enlist whom you choose in your company."

"When does this party leave?"

"Tomorrow they ride down the river. They'll camp there at least one night. It should be easy. They suspect nothing."

"It shall be done," Teran agreed. "What have I to lose?"

The spirits of the nine were gay as they left San Antonio and

headed down the river to show Cecily the land selected for the settlement. Cecily rode sidesaddle beside Jonathan Kirk, just behind her father and O'Rourke. Cris ranged far ahead with Giles Brady and Jess Leeman in the hope of finding game, while Gabe plodded along in the rear with Pablo Savias. They took two days to the journey, and Cecily was plied with questions. The others had been in Texas for a year, with little word from home. Her news was fresh to them. Part of the Louisiana purchase had been admitted as a state a few weeks before they left. The West Florida territory had been added to it, she told them; the first steamboat had made its way down the Mississippi since they'd been gone. Naval victories had been won in the war with England, declared in the previous June, though things hadn't gone so well with the land campaign.

Jonathan was more silent than the rest, his mind troubled by the confusion in San Antonio and the suspicion forming in his mind. The wine distributed so freely on the day of the massacre suggested that the disorders had been planned. Someone had paid for it. Why? The presence of Luiz and José at the casks suggested Miguel Salazar as the man responsible. He didn't understand that. Magee had discussed his arrangements freely with the young Virginian. He was aware of the Spaniard's financial stake in the venture.

Ben Marsten noticed his quiet. "What's troubling you, Jonty?"

"Maybe you can help me. Why should a man fight on our side throughout the war and then turn against us after we've won?"

"Spanish gold might be the answer."

"It's ambition, more likely," declared Cecily.

Jonathan frowned. "We've won our war. We hold Texas. What more could he want?"

What did Salazar want? Puzzling over it, Jonathan was surprised to realize how little he knew of Teresa's guardian. He wondered if his misgivings were prompted by dislike. He didn't think so. He became convinced that Cissy was right. But what was the fellow's ambition? Not money, surely. He had plenty and spent it too freely. The answer eluded him.

Once, Cecily and Jonathan deserted the others for a gallop

to a hill commanding a far view. It was on the second day. They could trace the path ahead by the fringe of trees which outlined the river's winding course.

"That's your new home off yonder." Jonathan pointed toward the horizon. "We'll be there before sundown."

Cecily's cheeks were flushed from the brisk ride and her eyes shone as she peered to the south. To her it seemed as if she were looking into the secure life she had come so far to find. Her eagerness was printed on her face. Turning to look at her, silhouetted lithe and vivid against the blue sky, Jonathan was astonished at the realization of her beauty. He had carried Teresa's image so long in his heart that he had shut out this other picture close at hand.

"I'm surprised that Johnny Durst isn't here," he said abruptly.

She looked at him in astonishment. "Why? He's pretty busy, you know."

"If I were in his shoes," the Virginian persisted, "no business would be so important as being with you."

She was smiling and her searching gaze was warm when she faced him. "That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me, Jonty, but you're mistaken about Johnny and me. Oh, I like him—a lot—but not in the way you seem to think."

"He's a fine fellow—" Jonathan was warm in his loyalties—"and he's well established. Why, he's Davenport's right-hand man now. Someday he'll probably be the wealthiest man in Texas." He hesitated. "I think perhaps you're making a mistake, Cissy. You have your own future to think of."

"And you think that's where my happiness lies?"

He nodded. "You've thought of others too long. It's time you remembered yourself for a change. Don't think I haven't noticed, Cissy. You've had to be the head of your family. It was you who brought them out here. You were the one who was determined to salvage a new life from the wreckage back there. Cris was just a boy, and your father—well, he'd lost his grip. But Ben has changed and Cris has grown up, too. They can stand on their own feet now."

Still she did not face him. "They are changed, both of them," she agreed. "I owe a lot of that to you, Jonty. I didn't realize

what a responsibility I was asking you to shoulder in taking them with you."

He didn't deny it. "The result was worth it, wasn't it? I'd try to do anything you asked of me, Cissy."

"I guess I felt that when I asked you to take them along. I've always had so much faith in you, Jonty."

He grinned. "Shucks, that's what friends are for. You're just like a sister to me."

"Well, don't assume the privileges of a brother and try to marry me off," she retorted. "Not to Johnny Durst or anybody else. I'll do my own choosing."

They were still on the hill when Jonathan's trained eyes detected the horsemen on the opposite side of the stream. It was the dust that first attracted his attention. With a scout's wariness, he gazed until the party emerged from a shallow fold of hills. They were a couple of miles off but from this vantage point easily discernible. Twenty men were riding south, paralleling their own course and some distance ahead of them.

The Virginian studied the moving miniatures intently. Then he scoffed at a momentary uneasiness. McFarland, with a strong body of scouts, was patrolling far to the southwest to guard against a *gachupine* invasion. Aside from that threat, the country was at peace. There was no cause for alarm. Yet he could not quite dismiss his uneasiness as they rode back to join the others. A party that numerous was not common; its strength hinted at some purpose he could not guess. They were headed in the same direction, which could mean only that they were from San Antonio. If they had been so close for the better part of two days, why had their presence not been discovered before? He discussed this with Giles.

"From San Antonio?" the Kentuckian scowled. "I don't like it. Thar's been some queer goin's on thar lately. You reckon this bunch air a-watchin' us?"

"But why?"

"Wal, we ain't totin' silver but we've got horses an' guns. Thar's been many a killin' for less since Kemper left."

They were within two hours' ride of their destination and Jonathan had confidence in the ability of his company to take

care of itself, but Cecily's presence was a complication. He made his dispositions precisely as if the war were still in progress and they were scouting enemy territory. Giles and Jess were sent across the river to reconnoiter the strange party. "We'll be camped along the river between Marsten's hill and mine," he explained. "Report there as soon as you can."

Pablo Savias and Gabe were sent ahead as an advance patrol. "Stay on this side of the river and scout out the camp site," they were instructed. "Report back at once if you notice anything suspicious." To Cecily he said, "We're probably just borrowing trouble," and watched how she would take it.

"This is just like being on the march with Kirk's Scouts," she said, and her eyes were sparkling.

At first Gabe and Pablo galloped briskly, not checking their gait until they had left the main party more than a mile behind. After that they alternated between a walk and a slow jog, their alert scrutiny searching the terrain ahead. It was a familiar routine to them both and the country was open, affording little cover for an enemy. There were occasional copses of live oaks, however, and these were subjected to search in a method long since perfected by the company. One scout would dismount at a safe distance, ready to cover his companion's retreat should it become necessary, while the other advanced to explore the thicket. The river, of course, afforded ample concealment for an army, but it lay a full mile to their left. Jonathan had chosen a more direct course which would cut the winding stream near their destination. The two men performed their task thoroughly but saw nothing to excite alarm. The sun was still an hour high as they approached the twin hills that marked the spot chosen for the settlement. The river twined between them. Trees screened the crest of the slope on the right. "Jonathan's Hill" they had named it. They searched this place without result before turning toward the river. They alternated their duties, and this time it was Pablo's turn to investigate while Gabe stood guard. The Negro watched his companion until he disappeared in the thick foliage massed along the bank.

Pedro Teran had not reckoned on any such cautious approach. His ambush had been well planned. He had observed

the course of the advancing party, noting where it would intercept the stream, and had rightly chosen the spot for his trap. It would be an easy task for his marksmen to pick off the unsuspecting travelers as they rode down the open slope. His men were well concealed.

He had watched with dismay when Gabe had scouted the trees on the hilltop with the alert Savias in reserve. This was not to his liking and his quandary was increased when he saw the precaution with which they started to reconnoiter his own position. He did not fear an open conflict; he had all the weight of numbers. Yet this was becoming an affair different from an ambush, and his instructions were to get the whole party.

"Hold your fire," he whispered when Pablo approached. "The knife will do for this one. He must not sound an alarm."

As the scout entered the fringe of shrubbery, his quick eyes were alert but there had been nothing yet to arouse suspicion. He heard the rustle of leaves, and whirled to face the danger. A knife slashed cruelly at his shoulder. He hammered his antagonist back with his rifle barrel. He was too close for a shot. Again he struck. The blow echoed sharply as it crushed the skull of his opponent. But the odds were too great. Unseen hands snared him from behind and dragged him down. He struggled vainly until another blade was buried in his back.

Pablo had only one thought as he felt himself sagging into oblivion. Gabe must be signaled. His rifle seemed very heavy in his hands now. It was an effort to reach the trigger. The world about him already was dimming when, with his last conscious exertion, he pulled the trigger. The explosion sounded faint in his ears. There was a savage curse and he was buffeted by blows he never felt. Pablo Savias was dead.

Gabe heard the shot. Anxiously, he scanned the foliage for sign of his friend. Orders for such emergencies were explicit. He must cover his companion's retreat if possible, but failing that, his first obligation was to keep the column informed. He was holding both horses and he looped the reins through his left arm while he checked his priming. "Pablo," he called uncertainly. No response. He lingered, reluctant to desert his friend.

Teran hoped he would follow into the trap, and held his

fire. As he waited, he noticed a dry gully where rains had washed a path at right angles to the stream, and he sent several men scurrying in that direction to cut off the Negro should he turn back.

Gabe swung into the saddle. The thing to do, he had decided, was to inform Mist' Jonty.

"Shoot!" cried Teran. "Don't let him get away." There was no further use for concealment.

The range was long. Gabe got away unscathed but his horse fell. He flung himself from the saddle and jumped for Pablo's mount. That was when the fire opened up from the gully. The frightened animal lunged away and started to run. The Negro saw the smoke and, realizing his plight, dashed for the nearest cover—the trees on the hilltop. There he turned. From the height the figures in the gully could be made out. He took careful aim at the nearest of them but he was too far away. He shook his head when a puff of dust marked the bullet's impact. He was sure of Pablo's fate now. I got to warn Mist' Jonty, he thought. He reloaded his rifle before starting his retreat. His course carried him at an angle over the shoulder of the hill and out of range of the hostile rifles. At first he ran too fast, but he was quick to know it and soon settled down to a long, shambling stride.

Teran perceived his purpose. Gabe had scarcely disappeared before three horsemen were after him. He heard them coming and quickened the pace again.

"I jus' got to git to Mist' Jonty," he kept repeating as if to urge on his tiring legs. "I jus' got to warn him."

His breath was a sobbing pain. A bullet whined overhead; another slapped at the ground viciously to his right.

"Dey can't aim whilst dey's ridin'," he muttered and, glancing back, counted his pursuers. "Only one more wid a loaded gun," he noted. He turned on them. "One shot apiece," he told himself as he aimed at the nearest horseman. He was slow in shooting, his panting bothered his aim, but when he finally pressed the trigger a horseman fell, and he grunted in satisfaction. The answering bullet went wide and his remaining antagonists, cautious now, circled around him. Gabe loaded again hastily, but now he saw that his enemy was ahead of

him. His safest course was to remain where he was. If he made them come to him he had a chance. "But I got to warn Mist' Jonty," he mumbled, and once more started running.

Teran's men guessed his intention and were waiting, prone in the grass, at the brow of the next hill as he came lumbering toward them. He was an easy target. Both rifles blared at once.

"Got to warn Mist' Jonty," the Negro still was muttering when the end came.

But he did warn Jonathan. The party was too distant to hear Pablo's warning shot, but by the time the Negro made his stop to fight off pursuit, they were not so far away.

"Sounds like trouble." Jonathan's first uneasiness revived. "The rest of you wait here. I'll ride up and see what's going on."

He saw the two horsemen dismount behind the crest of the hill ahead and thought they were his scouts. He speeded his gait as he watched them take their positions in the grass. "They're being pursued," he thought, and hurried to join them.

The soft turf muffled the hoofbeats, and they were intent on their target. Only after they fired did they take alarm at his approach. He was scarcely fifty yards away when one of them started scrambling for his horse and he saw, with astonishment, that they were strangers. The other was trying to reload with frantic haste. Jonathan's rifle was ready; he jerked it to his shoulder as he left the saddle. Certain now that he guessed the meaning of the shots, he picked the man who stood his ground. At this range he couldn't miss. Before he had time to load again, the other had escaped.

The Virginian pushed on beyond the hill, warily now, in quest of his missing men. Almost immediately he found Gabe's body and knew what was up as clearly as if the devoted slave had reached him with the message.

He was tight-lipped, his expression dour, when he rejoined the others. "They must have picked Pablo off first." He reconstructed the scene. "Gabe died while he was trying to get back to warn us."

"'Twas loike him," O'Rourke muttered. "His skin may have been black, but thim that shot him was black clear through."

The sun was setting, a red flame in the west. Cecily said nothing but Jonathan noticed her eyes glisten in the fading light.

"I wish Jess and Giles were here." Ben Marsten glanced uneasily toward the river.

"They were to meet us up yonder. That's where they'll be," declared Cris.

Jonathan was thinking of the absent men, too. There might be desperate need for their rifles before long. If it had not been for Cecily, he would have attempted to reunite his little force. He knew his enemy's whereabouts and his strength, and the loss of two scouts would not have gone unavenged in normal circumstances. Her presence altered all that. He had with him now just the two Marstens and the one-armed O'Rourke. Their only wise course lay in flight, and yet he hesitated to leave without further effort to get in touch with Giles and Jess. If any two men were competent to look after themselves, these were, but he knew that they would not abandon him if the situation were reversed.

His decision was swift.

"We'll have to turn back," he began. "These are orders. Cris, you'll ride about a hundred yards in advance, O'Rourke with Cecily, Ben as the rear guard but not more than a hundred yards back. Keep close together. You're to stay on the trail we followed today and hold the best possible pace. Alternate between a walk and a canter. Your horses will keep going longer that way. If you hear anyone on the trail, either ahead or behind, pull aside and wait as quietly as you can. Keep out of sight. You're too small a force for a fight if it can be avoided. But above all, keep moving."

"What about you?" Cecily demanded.

"I'm going to find the others if I can. I may have to wait till morning. We'll be behind you but don't count on it being us if you hear someone. Stay hidden until you're sure you recognize us." His tone tried to conceal his anxiety but his words betrayed it.

"I don't like the idea of you staying here alone," Ben Marsten objected. "Let me join you. Two rifles are better than one."

"I'll stay." Cris was quick to volunteer.

"Why don't we all stay together?" Cecily asked. "I don't want you to divide your force because of me. I'm not afraid when I'm with Kirk's Scouts." Her voice sounded almost blithe.

Jonathan laughed but without mirth. "Then you're the only one who isn't, Cissy. These are orders. You'll do as I say. Now get going."

When Cecily looked back, Jonathan had turned off the trail and was riding toward the river.

He had no preconceived plan. He knew only two necessities. He would protect the back trail should pursuit come soon, and he would try to find the scouts he had sent across the river. He moved a hundred yards from the trail toward a thick copse, about an acre in extent. The trees were live oaks, surrounded by a miniature jungle of chaparral. He broke his way into the heart of the thicket where he tied his horse before returning to its edge.

From there he watched.

Teran was slow in organizing his pursuit. What had appeared an easy ambush had turned into something entirely different, and his men were sullen at the prospect of a long night ride. Three of their outfit were dead. Instead of an easy prey they had met a determined foe, and Teran's troop had less stomach for this type of fighting. He was still confident, however.

He was determined to win the reward Don Miguel had promised him.

A red afterglow was burning in the sky as the company approached Jonathan's hiding place.

The Virginian's frosty eyes glinted as he counted them. Cecily and her companions had scarcely more than thirty minutes' start. Their plight was desperate unless something were done. It would soon be dark. If he could delay the pursuit here, his friends would have a better chance. He checked the priming of both his rifle and his pistol, planning his action as he did so. Only the rifle would be effective at this distance but he hoped to give the impression that he was not alone. His aim on the first rider was deliberate. "This one's for you, Gabe," he promised as he squeezed the trigger. He followed this with a quick shot from the pistol to add to their confusion, and reloaded both

weapons feverishly while the surprised column was scattering out of range.

That second shot performed its purpose. Teran was convinced that several men were there; he hoped he had trapped the whole party. He dismounted his men and ordered the copse surrounded. He kept them safely out of range; he could afford to wait.

Giles Brady and Jess Leeman had made a wide detour until they picked up the trail they were seeking. This they followed until it turned toward the river.

"'Pears like thar's two parties plannin' to camp in the same spot tonight," Jess observed, reining in his horse.

"I reckon we'd best have a look," Giles suggested. They left their horses beyond the hill and circled cautiously till they struck the river well below Teran's ambush. Under cover of the thick undergrowth they were approaching silently from the south when Pablo met his death. They heard his shot and it increased their stealth. There was another rattle of musketry. They were too far away to see what happened and the cause of the shots puzzled them, but they decided Jonathan should be warned without further delay. Their retreat was as furtive as their approach, and by the time they had made their way back to the horses it was nearing sunset.

This perturbed them both.

"We'll have to hustle," Giles observed. "Jonty cain't be far from the river by now."

"Best thing is to cut across and head 'em off," Jess suggested.

They forded the river to accomplish this, but were uncertain which way to turn.

"I ain't sure whether they've passed this point or not. What do you think?" Jess inquired.

"You ride one way and I'll ride t'other," his companion suggested.

Their decision was delayed by a party of horsemen heading north at a slow gallop. They watched it pass, from the shelter of the river bank, spotting it as the company they'd been scouting. Jess thought he knew what had happened. "Pablo and Gabe have discovered the trap and carried Jonty word," he

said. "Our comp'ny is halted somewhar up the trail. The thing for us to do is to git back thar and jine 'em."

Sure that this was what had occurred, they waited until the cavalcade had gone by, and then followed, clinging to the shadows along the river. They were not far behind when Jonathan opened fire. "I don't like it," Giles said. "They'll rush 'em soon as it's dark. Why didn't Jonty pick a spot along the river whar they couldn't be surrounded?"

"I reckon havin' Cissy on his hands troubled him right smart," Jess offered. "It's troublin' me, too. I reckon the next move is up to us."

They left their horses tethered by the stream and crept silently forward. The movement of Teran's men was guarded, but they were no match for these two frontiersmen in stealth. Giles agreed to a plan Jess outlined. A path must be cut through that narrowing circle so that their friends could be guided to safety.

Each carried his rifle in his left hand and gripped a knife in the right.

In surrounding Jonathan's retreat, Teran had spread his line thin. His men were spaced at thirty-yard intervals, which would narrow as they converged. Each of the scouts chose a victim and stalked him craftily. Jess reached his man first. There was no outcry, just the swift thrust of a blade and a stifled groan. When he continued his advance, he left a still form behind. He met Giles at the border of the chaparral. "If they move quick, they can ride out now," he said. "It's plumb dark and we've cleared a path nigh a hundert yards wide."

Jonathan was startled when he heard someone cautiously calling his name.

He gripped his rifle, ready for an enemy trick. Then he recognized Jess's voice, and answered.

"Tarnation! I thought we'd never find you," the scout complained. "Whar's the others?"

Jonathan explained. "I'm sorry you got drawn into this trap," he concluded.

"Trap, hell! Git your horse. We've got us a trail blazed out o' hyar."

Sound of the horse would draw fire, of course, but it could

not be effective in the dark. It was agreed that the other two should go first and get as far through the lines as possible before Jonathan's dash warned the enemy. They were to meet on the river bank where the scouts had left their mounts.

Jonathan watched as his friends quickly vanished into the screening night, and waited for fully five minutes before mounting. Then he dug in his spurs and thundered out the same path. Several rifles flashed but their aim was erratic. As he drew near the river, he checked his speed and heard Jess's voice calling.

Chapter 14

Approaching Decision

ALL THAT night Jonathan and his companions rode hard to overtake the rest of their party. They evaded Teran's force by crossing the river and riding up the east bank until satisfied they had outdistanced pursuit. Then they recrossed and picked up their old trail. Their concern was to make sure that they were between Cecily and the bandits. If the chase was maintained, they were determined to be in a position where they could take a hand. Feeling sure their gait had not been matched, they called a halt to breathe their spent animals. As for Teran, he was in a frenzy when he discovered his prey had escaped. More than an hour elapsed before he fully realized it, and then he had difficulty with his men. They wrangled over the best course to follow, and were slow in starting pursuit.

Dawn found the three parties strung out along the trail. O'Rourke and the two Marstens, guarding Cecily, came first. Jonathan's stand in the copse had given them a good start. He and the two scouts came next. They were husbanding their horses now, walking them thirty minutes at a time.

"A lot may depend on their condition before the day's over," he cautioned.

They were still leading their animals when, with the coming of daylight, they spied the bandit horsemen coming up rapidly on the back trail. "They haven't seen us yet," said Jonathan. He led the way around the shoulder of a hill, dodging the ridge which would have revealed their whereabouts, and preoccupied with a study of the ground ahead.

"We might show 'em up by makin' a stand up yonder." Jess indicated the hill's crest.

Jonathan shook his head. "Too easy for them to surround

us there," he objected. "We've got to keep between them and Cecily. We'll check them when the time comes."

Presently the Virginian found the site he was seeking. Here was another low ridge, sloping gradually toward the river to the east while, on the west, it continued its ascent, culminating in a high hill. "This will do," he decided. "The river will slow them up if they try to circle us in that direction and the hill will block them over there." He indicated the advantage of the position with a sweep of his arm. "Spread out a little," he urged. "Keep an interval of at least twenty yards. It will make our force seem bigger. Fire as soon as you're certain of your target. That'll give us time to reload for a second volley if they try rushing us."

The horses were left in the rear and they crept to their positions. It was a tactic familiar to them all. Jonathan watched the horsemen approaching, and counted their number—fourteen. His grip on the rifle tightened as he selected a target.

The blast from the hillside threw the bandits into confusion, but Teran rallied them. "Charge!" he shouted. "Charge them while their guns are empty." They started up the hill, horses at gallop. But the scouts' guns were ready. The second volley was equally deadly. Teran's horse went down and two more men fell. The attack broke. Teran, afoot, had been left behind and the leaderless outlaws scattered. More than half their company had been lost. The survivors needed no further discouragement.

"We'd best start ridin'," Giles suggested.

Jonathan was ramming home another bullet. "Their leader's afoot," he declared. "I'm going to get him. Keep me covered, in case his friends turn back."

He started down the hill, running easily. Teran was trying to catch a riderless horse. Jonathan's bullet was accurate. Jonathan walked over and turned the dead man on his back. He stared at him silently.

"Did you know him?" Jess asked later.

"It was Teran, one of the gang who murdered Salcedo."

"Odd, ain't it? One gang seems to be behind all the devilment hyar."

"Very odd," said Jonathan

He had little to say during the remainder of the ride. They reached San Antonio that afternoon, stiff with weariness, to find that Cecily and the others had preceded them safely by an hour.

Miguel looked up from his breakfast when Teresa entered the room. "The stage is set for the final act," he told her. "Sit over there and I'll tell you about it."

"Let me sit here." She pulled his head against her shoulder and rubbed her cheek against his forehead as he kissed her throat.

"There'll be no talking done if you keep this up." He laughed. "Either you'll have to sit across the table or go back to bed."

"Whatever you want, darling." She sat across from him. "Now will you tell me? What is this last step?"

"I wanted one final crime, worse than the rest; something to shock the people and make them clamor for someone to rule them," he began.

"And you've found it?" She interrupted eagerly.

He nodded. "It must have taken place by now. We should get word of it today. Do you want to know more about it?"

"I can hardly wait." Her eyes were glowing.

"Nine *americanos* rode down the river three days ago, eight men and a young woman. Teran has orders to ambush them. None will escape."

Teresa felt no twinge of pity. "I wish there were more," she said.

"Nine will do. I selected them with care. One of them was someone you know."

His smile was sardonic. She realized then. He hardly needed to fill in the name.

"Jonathan Kirk! A very nice touch, don't you think? The fellow never liked me. Now, by his death, he's helping me more than he'll ever know." His smile was frozen on his lips. "Jonathan Kirk has been of great service to us both, my dear," he concluded.

When Jonathan awoke his weariness was gone but his first

thought was of Gabe, and mingled with his sorrow was a cold anger. Cissy was cooking breakfast. "The man who led the attack on us was an officer of the company that murdered Salcedo," he began abruptly.

She looked up, frowning. "You think it's all part of the same business?"

"I'm sure of it."

"This man you suspect—he must think you stand in his way. Who is it, Jonty? I can find out. You know. You said he risked a fortune backing Magee."

Because she already knew so much and because he needed someone in whom he could confide, he identified Salazar and told her his suspicions.

"And you recognized two of his men at the wine barrels," she mused, when he finished. "Was Teran also Salazar's man?"

"I can't be sure. He was from San Antonio, though."

The next question surprised him. "What really happened to Magee?"

He was pledged to secrecy on that. "Didn't you hear?"

"I heard all sorts of stories—that he died of pneumonia—that he took his own life. That isn't true. I knew Magee."

"No," he answered slowly. "That isn't true, Cissy, but I've given my word. I can't tell you about it. That all happened long ago. What's it got to do with what's going on here now?"

"Just this. Magee is dead. Gutierrez is deposed. Of the three men who started out together, only Salazar is left and he seems to be the man behind this violence. Does that make sense?"

"Salazar didn't depose Gutierrez."

"No," she admitted. "But if Teran was Salazar's man he was implicated in the massacre. That's what brought it about."

"Salazar didn't kill Magee."

"Then who did?"

"Listen, Cissy, you're trying to worm something out of me that I'm not supposed to tell. I'll say this much, and you'll just have to take my word for it. I was the one who was supposed to die that night."

She looked at him searchingly. "You were supposed to die yesterday, too, Jonty."

He laughed grimly. "I'm still here."

"Don't be so confident," she warned. "That makes me afraid for you. This is a time for caution."

He sniffed. "You'd better quit worrying about me and mind the breakfast."

He grinned as she turned in dismay to the stove. The biscuits were burning.

Cecily continued to worry about him, though. She found time for a word with Jess.

"Don't fret, Cissy. I'll keep an eye on him," the lank scout promised.

After breakfast Jonathan went straight to Perry. McFarland was still away on patrol but Gaines and Taylor were summoned. He told them what had happened. "Kemper was right," Jonathan declared. "We won the war but we're losing the peace. Unless we set up a safe government, sooner or later we'll have to follow him back across the border."

"I agree—" Perry pulled at his ear reflectively—"but after our experience with Gutierrez whom can we trust? Time's on our side. Dozens of Americans are coming in every day. We only had a hundred and fifty men when Kemper left but our force has doubled. We'll soon have a real army again. Let's bide our time till we're stronger and then set up our own government."

"Why wait?" Jonathan protested. "Let's act now. Once the word spreads that we've set up such a nation, settlers will flock in. We can't afford to go on this way."

All four were of the same mind as to the goal; their only difference concerned the need for immediate action.

Jonathan hesitated to voice his suspicions of Salazar till he had more proof, but prospect of delay forced his hand. He plunged into his story, beginning with the wine casks. "I don't know what he has in mind," he concluded, "except it's something we won't like. I'm sure of that. He's taken a lot of pains to get rid of us."

Gaines whistled softly. "Some of these damn fool things begin to make sense," he said.

Taylor frowned at the table. "Jonty's right," he growled. "It's time to act."

Perry wasn't so sure. "If we can put off a show-down for a few weeks," he objected, "we'll be too strong for 'em. Let's wait and keep our eyes open."

They put it to a vote. Gaines and Taylor voted with Jonathan. It was decided to call a meeting that night at which Perry should preside. At his suggestion, Menchaca and Sava, in recognition of their rank, were to be invited.

"If they're here they can't argue that they didn't have a voice in it," Perry declared. "And it may avoid trouble. We don't want to start our republic with a civil war if we can help it."

"There won't be any trouble," Taylor promised grimly. "I'll have my company ready."

Jonathan next turned toward La Quinta. He must see Teresa.

Miguel had told Teresa his plans before he left the house. This was the day. As soon as Teran brought word of the massacre the play would begin. Menchaca would declare martial law and hold his troops ready to strike at the Americans should they cause trouble. Sava's smaller company would patrol the streets. The proclamation placing Salazar at the head of the government was prepared. In it he was styled generalissimo: "king" would come later, but the power was already assured. The only uncertainty was the attitude of the Americans.

"If there's any trouble it will come quickly," he had told her. "Some of them may leave as Kemper did." He smiled. "I hope so. If they resist—well, Menchaca has a thousand men."

To stir up the enthusiasm of the people, Salazar planned a thanksgiving service at the San Fernando church. There was to be an interval of two hours between the proclamation and this service to make sure of the American stand. If nothing occurred to delay the service, Teresa should attend in her gold carriage. "It will give them something to cheer," he added.

"And don't forget I'm popular with the American troops," she added. "I can win you friends."

"Let me choose my own friends," he had retorted dryly and left.

So this was to be her great day! Teresa dressed for her role. The clinging yellow silk molded her figure. Maria was completing her coiffure when word came there was a gentleman

to see her. Teresa supposed it was a messenger from Miguel as she hurried down the stairs. She had no thought of Jonathan. He had had his hour of sadness in her heart. Great things were doing. She hurried, impatient for the news.

Jonathan was waiting in the hall.

"Darling!" He hurried toward her.

Teresa halted, staring. "Jontee," she faltered. "Is it really you?" The words were a release for long-pent emotion. She groped her way toward him, for tears blinded her eyes and her body shook with the violence of her sobs. "Jontee! Jontee!"

He sheltered her in his arms. "What is it, Teresa? Tell me."

She could not be soothed. Her emotion was too complex. Mingled with her joy at having him was frustration when she realized what his presence meant. The restless horses were harnessed to the coach which was to carry her to the church. Were he not here, the bells would soon be ringing to proclaim the reign of a new ruler, and she would share in the triumph. All her hopes seemed to totter around her.

"I've come to take you away from here," he told her. "You can't stay in this house any longer."

"Not yet," she managed to say.

"Yes, now."

"I can't." She quivered in a new outburst of weeping. "Not now," she repeated. "I'll send for you tonight if I can." She fled up the stairs.

Miguel Salazar waited in the presidio for word which would set his plans in motion. With him were Menchaca and Sava.

"What are we waiting for?" Sava was growing restless.

"My men are ready," Menchaca grumbled. "Say the word and I'll act now."

Miguel's fingers twisting behind his back were the only sign of his nervousness. "No. I'll give the word." These lieutenants knew nothing of the incident he had planned.

First hint of disaster came, not to the presidio, but to Perry's headquarters in La Villita. The shots were heard throughout the town as two horsemen galloped in on lathered animals, firing their warning as they came. They were the only surviving members of the guard in charge of the American *caballado.*

"The *gachupines!*" cried one. "There's an enemy army at our heels."

They told their story breathlessly. A strong enemy patrol had attacked them, killing their three companions and capturing the American horses pastured south of the town.

"How many were there?" Perry demanded.

"About fifty in the bunch that jumped us," was the reply, "but we were chased by two other patrols. There must have been a hundred men in one of them."

"This is a job for you, Jonty," the major declared. "Take what's left of Lockett's old company and reconnoiter. We've got to know what we're up against."

The warning shots were heard in the presidio. "That's it," Salazar thought. "Someone's brought word of the massacre." Aloud he said: "Have the bells sounded, Sava. We need wait no longer."

His aide hurried to set in motion the machinery that would crown the long months of planning. Salazar stood watching from the long windows. He was tempted to send Teresa word but he knew she would be listening as impatiently as he. She would know their meaning when the clamor of the bells began. He was still standing there when Major Perry galloped up, accompanied only by Gaines. He smiled as he noted their haste. "Excellent," he thought. "If they have any objections to my plan, they can be detained here. The Americans will be leaderless."

Their news stunned him. "There's a royalist army right on top of us," Perry began bluntly. "They've killed most of the men guarding our horses. A couple escaped to bring me word. I've already sent Kirk out to ascertain their strength and location. We have a fight on our hands."

Salazar sat down slowly. For the moment his wits were numbed.

Just then the bells began their startling clangor. "Someone else has heard the news," the major remarked, not realizing the significance of the signal. "Good! That alarm will save us time. Muster your troops, Menchaca. Issue powder and ball. Masicot is already posting sentries around the town. I have Taylor assembling the rest of my men."

"How can this be?" Salazar's mind was beginning to function again. "I thought McFarland was patrolling the south to guard against any such surprise."

"He was," Perry admitted, "but we haven't heard from him. Either he was cut off or wiped out. This is not time to wonder about what's already happened. Our job is to plan what happens next."

Jonathan rode straight west from San Antonio, his force thirty strong. With the enemy to the south he intended to get on the flank where he would be least expected. He maintained this course for nearly an hour, then turning sharply to his left he began angling back toward the river. He saw the dust of the enemy column long before he glimpsed any hostile troops, but the length of the cloud gave some indication of their strength. His advance was more wary now. The company fretted when he kept it inactive and hidden, while a *gachupine* patrol trotted by not a quarter of a mile away. "If I attack now," he reasoned, "I'll simply drive them back to their main body. I want prisoners." He let them pass and then took up their trail. He wanted to cut them off.

They circled behind the enemy party. Once between them and their army, caution was abandoned. Evidently thinking the Americans were friends the lieutenant in command obligingly halted to wait for them, and they were within fifty yards before he discovered his mistake. Then it was too late.

"Fire!" shouted Jonathan.

They were still at a gallop and the volley lacked accuracy. Only a few men fell. It was the surprise that was effective. The enemy bolted in panic, the Americans at their heels. Seven prisoners were taken, including the officer in command. This achieved, Jonathan promptly headed his troop back for San Antonio, riding swiftly now and detouring, as formerly, to avoid further contact. He knew the course of the hostile army and depended on the captives for more detailed information.

The story told by the prisoners was not reassuring. The royalist army was nearly three thousand strong and commanded by Colonel Ignacio Elizondo, notorious for his ruthlessness. "He's the renegade republican who betrayed Hidalgo

to his death!" Menchaca exclaimed. According to the captives, his force was half regulars, half militia.

A council of war was called immediately. It met in the governor's palace. Salazar was present with Menchaca and Sava, representing the native troops; with Perry were Gaines, Taylor, Masicot and Jonathan Kirk. There still was no word from McFarland. Of the force available, Perry had three hundred Americans now, Menchaca a thousand Mexicans. There were still about fifty Lipan Indians available from McFarland's old command.

Sava counseled falling back but Perry vetoed this. "The odds have been worse than this before," he commented dryly. "What we need is unity of command. That's the only way we can act effectively. Our second problem is the panic in the town. They think we're already beaten. I'm more afraid of treachery in our rear than I am of the enemy in my front. That's why I've posted guards around the place. No one moves in or out. Those are orders."

"Menchaca leads most of our troops," Salazar suggested. "Why not unify our command under him?"

The swart Mexican captain rolled expectant eyes at Perry.

"I've been fightin' under Perry a long time." Taylor's voice was brusque. "I know what he can do. The Americans will follow no one else." The captain had one drooping eyelid. It gave his face a saturnine cast when he glared at Menchaca.

"Por Dios! Where will you be without me and my men?" Menchaca demanded.

"Where will you be without us?" Gaines retorted.

The two factions, whose open conflict had been interrupted by this emergency, faced each other defiantly.

Masicot was the peacemaker. He was the one man who commanded the respect and friendship of both sides. "How can we expect to defeat an enemy while we're quarreling among ourselves, gentlemen?" he questioned.

Salazar had hoped to entrench his position by the selection of his candidate, but he was too shrewd to permit a deadlock. After all, this battle must be won or all his schemes would be nullified. "Captain Masicot is right, as usual," he said suavely. "The solution is to let Menchaca command his troops and

Perry lead the Americans, but they should both be under the direction of a leader in whom we all share confidence. I suggest Captain Masicot for that position."

Perry was quick to agree, even though this placed him under one of his own officers. "I'm satisfied with that," he assented.

"Wait!" It was the nominee himself who objected. "It is admitted that part of our problem is the wavering loyalty in the town. I suggest we choose a man who can cure that. In this emergency we must forget all prejudice. Gutierrez is the man. He led us before. The people have confidence in him."

There was a chorus of protests from the Americans but Masicot was firm.

"You're forgetting all his good qualities in the memory of his crime," he said. "I'm not condoning what he did but I'm calling your attention to the fact that he can unify the command at a time we must have unity or perish. First, let's win this victory. He can help us do it. After that, do what you please."

Salazar listened intently. He liked the suggestion. It would suit him to have Gutierrez more than any other because he could be so easily removed when the emergency had passed. "It's a splendid suggestion," he agreed.

The Americans finally yielded but only with reluctance and with the stipulation that Masicot should act as the new generalissimo's aide. This would provide them with a safeguard which they felt they needed.

Perry and Taylor were named to notify Gutierrez of his restored authority.

Chapter 15

The Battle of Alazan

Don Bernardo Gutierrez made an auspicious start. He approved Perry's action in establishing a strong guard around San Antonio to avert traffic with the enemy from within. He issued a proclamation, signing himself generalissimo, in which he pledged that order would be swiftly restored and called upon the citizens for support. To occupy them he set them the task of making hundreds of spears in imitation of the weapons designed by Magee at La Bahia to take the place of bayonets.

There was considerable artillery in San Antonio, including the pieces captured there and at La Bahia, but ammunition was lacking. Perry ordered a thorough inventory. The four best guns were selected and the rest spiked. Elizondo's patrols had captured the American *caballado* on June eighteenth, but his main force did not arrive opposite San Antonio until the next day. He chose for his camp a low hill of slight elevation, lying between the San Pedro and Alazan creeks. They roughly paralleled the course of the river, the San Pedro in the middle, Alazan farther west. The royalist leader immediately prepared for battle. He threw up two large earthen bastions about four hundred yards apart, at either extremity of his camp, and connected them with a trench less formidable in character. He was within plain sight of the presidio walls but beyond gunshot. By nightfall his position was ready. An attacking force would have to cross San Pedro Creek at the foot of the slope and storm straight into his fortifications. He was sure of his strength but careful to yield his opponents no advantage.

Inside the town the defenders were as ready as they ever would be. Gutierrez called a conference. McFarland's patrol had slipped in that afternoon. Cut off and pursued by enemy cavalry, he had traveled to the east to join his comrades.

"We could repel a force twice as strong," Gutierrez said. "We're fighting behind stone walls."

"Another siege!" Perry objected, remembering La Bahia. "I don't like it. I'm for surprising them and fighting it out in the open."

McFarland supported him. "If we wait," he asserted, "Elizondo may have a force twice as large. Arredondo is collecting an army at Laredo. Let's whip them now before they have time to get re-enforcements."

The stolid Menchaca had remained silent. Gutierrez turned to him. "What is your opinion, Captain?"

"I don't talk so well," the Mexican grumbled. "Let others do the arguing. Fighting is my business. Only tell me what you want and I will tear the *gachupines* apart. You will see." He thumped his chest pompously. "Menchaca is the man who will win your battle."

His arrogance was received in silence. Taylor would have replied but Masicot checked him. This was no time for argument. One thing all the officers shared—confidence. None wanted to follow Don Bernardo's plan and await the enemy attack. Finally it was agreed that Elizondo's camp should be stormed at dawn.

The preparations were thorough and every step was taken to make the surprise complete. The Americans were organized into two companies, Gaines commanding one with Jonathan Kirk as his lieutenant, Taylor heading the second, backed by McFarland. They were to fight as a unit under Perry. Menchaca formed his regiment into three battalions commanded by Sava, Delgado, who was restored to command in this emergency, and Francisco Ruiz, newly promoted to a captaincy.

The plan of the assault was fully discussed. The largest of the *acequias* flowed in a southwesterly direction after leaving the town, its course concurring with that of San Pedro Creek at a distance of about a hundred yards, although it veered away at a point almost opposite the royalist camp. The little army was to use this stream to mask its movements that night and wait for the assault along its wooded banks. The necessity for silence was impressed upon every man. The departure was fixed for ten o'clock in order to give the troops time to get in

position before the late moonrise. Gaines's company was to lead.

It was a stealthy advance, with the commands whispered, the men marching in a single file, and each carrying both a rifle and a lance.

Denis O'Rourke insisted on accompanying his comrades. "Oi've not missed a foight yet and Oi've no moind to start now," he retorted when Jonathan demurred.

"I'd feel safer if there were someone here with Cissy," Jonathan said, reluctant to mention the Irishman's missing arm.

"It's me empty sleeve you're thinkin' of," O'Rourke replied, "but Oi'm a better man with wan hand than many a man with two." He pulled back his coat to display two pistols thrust into his belt. "Oi've been practicin'," he assured his leader. "If it takes me a bit longer to load, shure Oi've got an extra bullet to make up for it."

Jonathan objected no further. The rest of his old company were with him.

Soundlessly, the entire force crouched in its new position. Elizondo's sentries heard nothing to cause alarm. The long wait was difficult. Some succeeded in sleeping, but for the most part the army huddled in the shadows and strained its eyes toward the royalist earthworks where the guards were clearly discernible in the bright moonlight. It had been agreed that there would be no vocal commands. Gutierrez, far to the right with Sava's company, would give the signals to advance and these were to be transmitted down the line from officer to officer by the clasp of a hand. The army was to move to its final position at the first signal, attack at the second.

The initial warning passed down the silent line at four o'clock. The army crept forward with furtive silence, hugging the ground as the friendly cloak of shadows was left behind. The tall grass rippled with secret movement. It was a cautious, squirming progress until the creek was reached and more trees spread cordial arms to shield them from the moonlight. The men waded the shallow stream and lingered in the prudent gloom of the far bank. From here the enemy line was less than thirty yards.

Elizondo's bugles sounded at five o'clock, calling his men to

matins. Once more the signal passed from company to company. Crafty Indian fighters stalked the sentries in the final advance. Jess Leeman's knife silenced one guard, Giles Brady pounced on another. All along the front the pattern was the same. Gaines's company was opposite the south bastion of the royalist camp where a flag was flying. Elizondo's first warning of the attack came when he saw those colors hauled down by Ben Marsten.

The whole line of his fortifications was swarming with men. He had prudently assembled his troops for prayer under arms and his response was immediate. A shattering volley halted the onset, and he followed this with a bayonet charge. The first impact was at the south bastion. Gaines's company had held its fire till now. The Spaniards wavered under the blast of their lead but they kept coming. It was wooden spear against bayonet. Elizondo lashed his men forward mercilessly. The Americans were driven back. Along the breastworks the conflict resolved itself into a series of battles. Taylor's men clung to a length of trench. Menchaca's battalions were split in two. Sava reeled back from the north bastion. Menchaca was trying another charge.

From his position on the left, Jonathan could see the wavering lines, but their pattern was confused. He helped Gaines re-form the company along the creek. They charged again, holding their fire until they reached the bastion and blasting its defenders out as they topped the parapet. Elizondo's cavalry countercharged, beating the Americans back with sabers. There was no time to see how the battle went elsewhere. Jonathan followed Gaines in four charges. Each time they were driven back.

"Their countercharge always catches us with empty rifles," Gaines counseled. "This time we'll drive 'em out with the spear. We'll be ready for 'em when they come back."

Jonathan was at his side as they dashed forward. Close behind came his old company, merged with the new command and still intact despite the heavy losses of the day. The men yelled lustily as they ran. The Spanish fire was ragged; they were handicapped by the same oversight against which Gaines was guarding: too many of their rifles were empty. Gaines

was the first to scramble up the earthen bank but there were a score of men at his heels. He fell in that last blistering volley. The attack wavered. Jonathan saw Jess leap into the bastion and followed after him. For a moment they were alone there, pressed back by a ring of bayonets.

"What are we waitin' for?" yelled O'Rourke as the line faltered. He could not carry a lance. Drawing the first of his pistols, he blazed at the nearest target. "Drive 'em!" he yelled. "Drive 'em! Come on, Jonty's already inside."

Ben Marsten and Giles Brady were right behind him. Their rush rallied the others; the moment of hesitation was past; the company swarmed over the bastion, shouting as they came.

"Spear and bayonet!" Jonathan warned as the *gachupines* began to yield. "Save your fire."

Fully half his force was wielding captured weapons, their steel more deadly than the wooden lances. The enemy was driven back.

Elizondo watched the changing tide and again hurled cavalry forward to check them, but this time they were ready with loaded rifles.

"Pick a target," Jonathan ordered. "Don't shoot till I give the word. Make it count."

He waited until the *gachupines* were at point-blank range before giving the command. The Spanish ranks shuddered. Horses and men were tangled in the carnage at their van, slowing those in the rear who still struggled on. The column recoiled.

"Load! Load!" Jonathan shouted. "They'll be back for another dose."

Elizondo threw another charge at them but by now they were firmly established in the position and the enemy faced a storm of hot lead. Again they recoiled.

The Spanish leader was determined to crush this flank. Jonathan could see the position more clearly from here. Elizondo was pulling troops from other points to strengthen his offensive. Masicot, at the opposite end of the line, was quick to grasp the situation. "Charge!" he ordered, striking the weakened enemy viciously with Sava's battalion. The royalists' left

flank crumpled under the double impact. Elizondo tried to reenforce the weak point too late; his militia already was falling back. The panic spread to his center and even his seasoned veterans retreated. The troops poised for a blow at Jonathan's men were turned against Masicot in an effort to bolster the shattered line. Taylor's company, firmly entrenched along the parapet, caught them in flank with a murderous fire. Jonathan opened up in their rear with a captured cannon. The advancing ranks buckled, increasing the disorder among the royalists. Then the whole republican line charged. Elizondo's regulars, assailed on three sides, fought grimly, but their comrades were already in flight and their obstinacy served only to increase the slaughter. The battle was lost.

For six hours the struggle had swayed back and forth with dogged resolution. Now the end came quickly. The last Spanish resistance collapsed. Elizondo succeeded in cutting his way through the overlapping lines with a small body of cavalry. Here and there, other groups forced their way out of the melee but these were few. More than a thousand of the best Spanish troops lay dead. Four hundred others were captured and the army's remnants were scattered in every direction. Elizondo found himself at the head of only eighty men when he left the field, although later he was able to rally four hundred of the fugitives in his retreat to Mexico.

Losses had been severe on the republican side, too. Masicot was shot down leading the final charge and lived only long enough to learn of the victory. Gaines was dangerously wounded but he would fight again. Of the three hundred Americans, nearly a third were dead and a like number wounded, the heaviest casualties having been sustained by Gaines's company which had borne the brunt of the fighting. Menchaca reported three hundred and thirty-one dead and more than five hundred wounded. It had been a great victory —the royalist army was hacked to pieces—but a costly one. As the *gachupines* retreated, many of them were trapped along the banks of Alazan Creek. Here their losses were heaviest and here most of the prisoners were taken. The battle took its name from this creek.

It was the first battle in which Salazar had borne anything

but a passive part. He served as Gutierrez' personal aide throughout and was with Menchaca during the final charge. "It was you who won the battle, Captain," he said as they returned from the carnage. "You've justified my faith. You've shown the *americanos* the quality of your fighting men."

Menchaca was drunk with success. "Together, you and I can rule this place, *viejo,*" he said familiarly. He measured the little column of returning Americans shrewdly. "They can't muster a hundred able men now. Say the word and I'll finish them off."

Salazar shrugged. "There aren't enough of them left to worry us. It's Gutierrez whom we must watch. The fellow will claim credit for your victory if he can. He bothers me more than the others."

The captain's eyes flashed dangerously. "Everyone should know it was Menchaca who won the battle. Let Don Bernardo keep a civil tongue in his fat head or he'll meet Salcedo's fate."

The town was converted into a hospital for the wounded. With more than six hundred patients to attend, there was scarcely a house which wasn't pressed into service. Of Jonathan's original company, Cris Marsten had a bullet through his shoulder and Giles Brady a bayonet slash in the thigh; both wounds were painful but not dangerous.

Gutierrez properly made the wounded his first consideration before calling a meeting of the officers. Salazar was there and Menchaca, backed by Sava, Delgado and Ruiz. There were four Americans, Perry, Taylor, McFarland and Kirk.

"This time we'll make good use of our victory," Don Bernardo began. "First, we must restore order and appoint officials to maintain it. Civil government must guarantee the privileges for which we fought." He was sure of their support. Success had restored his old self-assurance.

"Who will name these officials?" Menchaca demanded.

Gutierrez looked at him in surprise. "That's the purpose of this meeting," he explained. "As your leader, I'm asking authority to put the government on a substantial and permanent footing. We can't afford to repeat our mistakes."

Masicot's death had made Gutierrez' position with the Americans equivocal. They had agreed to his leadership con-

ditionally. Their trust in Don Bernardo was gone and with the second in command dead, they were reluctant to proceed. "The emergency is past," Perry asserted. "I agree that a strong civil government is necessary but you were named to head the army. We'll have to hold another election to name such a leader."

Gutierrez looked to the Mexicans for support. His glance fell upon Salazar but he made no response.

"I favor Don Bernardo." Francisco Ruiz was the only friend he had there.

"I nominate Major Perry," declared Taylor. "He's a man in whom we all have confidence."

"He's an *americano*." Menchaca's tone was challenging. "Shall a handful of foreigners rule us? My army wouldn't like that. Don Miguel Salazar is my choice."

"Where would we find an abler man?" demanded Sava in support of his chief.

Gutierrez had not anticipated this opposition. He hesitated. "Perhaps we should give the matter more thought before voting," he suggested. He wanted time to discuss this with Miguel. If he helped, the dilemma could be solved easily.

"There's no point in waitin'," the droop-eyed Taylor insisted. "We've already had too much of that."

"Vote now," Menchaca insisted.

Reluctantly, Gutierrez put the question. The names were offered in the order of their nomination. Don Bernardo had one vote. Perry's name was next; Taylor, McFarland and Kirk supported him. Casualties had thinned out his following. There were also three votes for Salazar, Sava and Delgado joining Menchaca.

"The decision will have to wait," the chairman decided: "the vote is a tie." Still hopeful of resolving the deadlock in his own favor, he refused to voice his choice. The meeting was adjourned.

His hope of discussing the matter with Miguel alone was frustrated. He found Menchaca already at La Quinta when he arrived.

"We're very busy, Bernardo," Miguel greeted him coldly. "The captain and I have matters of importance to discuss."

The governor could hardly credit his ears. The uncouth captain and the suave Salazar made a strange combination, and he was affronted by his friend's manner. But his need was desperate and he forced himself to smile. "My business is of the utmost consequence," he declared. "Surely you can spare me a few minutes."

"Speak quickly then."

"Perhaps Menchaca will excuse us," Don Bernardo suggested.

The stolid captain looked to Salazar for his cue.

"I have no secrets from the new commander of the army. Whatever you have to say to me may be said here."

Gutierrez saw that his errand was useless. Still he made an effort. "It was I who persuaded you to come here. You are my trusted friend, Miguel. I thought I could rely on you."

"If you've come to remind me of an old friendship, your errand can wait." Miguel turned once more toward Menchaca. "We are discussing affairs of state."

"Then you must have forgotten that I am the governor here."

"We've made other arrangements now, Bernardo. Your usefulness is ended. If you need money—" the tone was patronizing—"I'll advance you enough to get your family across the border. It would grieve me to see your head upon a pole."

Chapter 16

Checkmate

JONATHAN TRIED to see Teresa that afternoon. When he appeared at the door, his absence of caution alarmed her. She was certain of Miguel's success now and unwilling to run any public risk that might anger him. First let her have her throne. After that . . . She sent down a note by Maria.

"It is dangerous to meet here," it read. "Come to me in the garden tonight at nine. Come by way of the river and be careful you aren't seen. All my love." It wasn't even signed.

Her caution troubled him, hinting at peril he didn't understand. Next he went to Perry's headquarters. McFarland and Taylor were there.

"Looks like you called the turn, Jonty," the major greeted him. "Salazar has exposed his hand."

"What's to stop him?" Taylor demanded. "Masicot's dead; Gaines is wounded. We left too many votes on the battlefield."

"That's why I'm here." Jonathan paced the floor nervously. "We can't let that happen. Think what it would mean to have a governor who'd been behind all the lawlessness here. I'd sooner have Gutierrez, with all his faults."

"I'm with you," Taylor growled. "I'll fight, if necessary, to keep Salazar out."

"What with?" Perry tugged at his ear. "A third of our men are dead and half the rest are wounded."

"I've been thinking about this." Jonathan halted in front of the table. "As long as it's one of them against one of us, they'll stick together. But suppose we unite behind some Spaniard. Then we might have a chance."

Taylor laughed. "Menchaca, I suppose. He's Salazar's man."

"How about Ruiz?" Perry sounded doubtful.

"Don't know enough about him," McFarland grumbled.

"And he's the only one in the lot who isn't in Salazar's camp."

"I'm thinking of Toledo. Everyone respects him and he's certainly had nothing to do with Don Miguel." The Virginian urged his choice. "He fought with Gaines and me. I'll vouch for his courage."

The suggestion was greeted with silence. Jonathan grew uneasy. "What do you think?" he demanded of Perry.

"I think we can elect him," the major finally replied.

Don José Alvarez de Toledo had arrived in San Antonio only a few days before the battle of Alazan. Born in Santo Domingo of a notable Spanish family, he had been a deputy to the Spanish Cortes at Cadiz. However, his sympathy with the Hidalgo Revolution got him into trouble and he had been forced to flee the country. By birth and education, as well as by instinct, he was probably the most distinguished of the Mexican republican refugees and had attracted considerable attention in New Orleans where he had made his home. He had supported Gutierrez and Magee from the start of their venture. Even during the army's darkest days at La Bahia he had labored in its behalf, forwarding men and supplies to the best of his ability.

At San Antonio he had been confused by his reception. Gutierrez, who had welcomed him warmly, was at that time outside the confidence of the leaders. Salazar regarded the newcomer with distrust, and the other native leaders took their cue from him. There had been cordial messages to Masicot from mutual friends in New Orleans. The distinguished recruit had gravitated to the circle of Americans rather than to the company of his countrymen.

Before the meeting ended, the Americans agreed to unite behind Toledo.

It was a clear night. There was no moon but the stars were bright. The Virginian's steps clumped briefly on the wooden bridge that spanned Concepción *acequia* and then were deadened by the soft turf as he turned toward the river. There was an open field here, encircled on three sides by the tortuous stream, and on the opposite shore stood Salazar's villa. Jonathan knew the path well—he had walked it often—and his

impatient eyes, longing for a sight of Teresa, had memorized each detail of the walled garden. He was early for his tryst but further waiting had grown intolerable. The stout walls were impassable; the only available approach was from the water, but there was a fisherman's boat in a clump of willows near by. He had discovered it on one of his excursions, and had played with the thought of using it for just this purpose.

From the sooty shadows which wrapped the bank, three men watched his progress. "It's an *americano*," whispered one.

"Their pockets are heavy with silver and they wear fine clothes," another muttered. "This is a rich prize."

"Your words are always brave, Luiz, but where are you when there's work to be done with a knife?"

"I find you victims with money. You do not waste your time," was the aggrieved reply.

"Quiet. Do you want him to hear us?"

Luiz backed cautiously away. He had no stomach for the deadly work to follow. His task was to foment disorder and it had a double reward. As the growing violence terrorized the town, his master's generosity increased. And he shared in the spoils when the assassins had a prosperous night. Now he was seized with weakness. Never before had he been so close to the actual scene of the deed. His feet fumbled in nervous haste, a twig snapped beneath his weight.

Jonathan heard the faint sound and stopped short, his senses alert. That spared him from the first knife-thrust which only clawed at his coat. He had time to strike out savagely at his unseen assailant as he staggered back, half tangled in the groping arms of another antagonist. The man yelled as a second blow, reaching for Jonathan, slashed him instead. The Virginian fought desperately, his fists crunching against the man who clutched him. He was backing away, trying to fight free of the menacing shadows and into the open, when he tripped over a root. His arms were still flailing as he toppled backward.

Since Cecily's warning, Jess had been Jonathan's shadow. His was the silent gait of the trained woodsman. He had made no effort to overtake Jonathan, but he kept his figure in sight, and he made sure that the knife was loose in his belt as he

slipped cautiously along. When the path led across the open pasture he had dropped farther behind to avoid discovery, but his step quickened as his friend vanished into the dark curtain of trees. Then he heard the shout and started running.

"Hold on, Jonty, I'm comin'," he yelled, and freed his knife.

The attack ended as swiftly as it had begun. Surprised by the unexpected interference, both cutthroats took to their heels, crashing panic-stricken through the tangled brush. Pursuit was out of the question. Too many thickets offered concealment.

"You all right?" Jess queried anxiously.

"I think so." Jonathan scrambled to his feet. "You came just in time, though. They nearly had me."

"I was trailin' you," was the simple reply. "Come on, let's git out of these woods."

"I've got business," the Virginian explained. "I'm looking for a boat. I've seen it tied in a clump of willows along here."

"All right then, let's git busy." Jess started down the bank. "But loosen your knife in your belt. This ain't a healthy place to be."

They passed so close to the bushes where the trembling Luiz cowered that he could easily distinguish their words above the pounding of his heart. "This is a trip I'll have to take alone," Jonathan was explaining. "I'm going to meet someone across the river."

"I'm goin' along," Jess insisted. "When we git thar I'll wait in the boat, but I ain't goin' to turn back now."

They found the boat, and Jess pushed it out into the current. They pulled up to a small wharf at the foot of the garden, and Jonathan left his companion behind while he cautiously ascended the terraces. A candle flickered in the square lantern by the patio gate, and there Teresa waited.

She flung her arms about him, pulled him deeper into the shadows. "We must be careful. Miguel may return."

"I wish he would," Jonathan replied. "I wish he'd find you in my arms like this. I've nothing to hide, Teresa. Why should I skulk around in the night, like a thief?"

She halted his outburst with a kiss. It soothed her, gave her more assurance. "You think this separation isn't cruel for me, too?" she murmured.

"That's all ended, darling. Tonight you're leaving this place." He shook her by the shoulders. "Listen to me! I listened to you before. I know what I'm saying. Miguel Salazar is my enemy. He always will be. If you think you can change that, you're only fooling yourself."

"You don't understand, Jontee."

"I understand I love you and nothing can keep us apart. I can't let you stay any longer in this house. Why does Salazar hate me? It started when he found me kissing you, remember? He tried to kill me then. Think, Teresa! Why? It's because he loves you."

He still gripped her shoulders, holding her at arm's length.

"And I love you, Jontee—only you—surely you know."

"Yes."

She slid back into his arms. "I love you! I love you!" She repeated it over and over.

"And you're leaving with me tonight?"

Words wouldn't put him off now. She realized that. "If I go with you, we can't be married. The priest wouldn't do it without Miguel's consent. Still you want me to go?"

"I can't let you stay here."

She was through with waiting. Give her this hour and Jonathan was hers. He'd never get her out of his blood. "Then take me—now."

She pressed her body closer.

His arms tightened about her, then dropped to his sides. "Let's get out of here." His voice was unsteady. "I've a boat at the foot of the garden."

"No, here, Jontee. Take me now."

He frowned, puzzled. "Are you crazy? I want to marry you."

How could she manage him? He still was younger than she thought. She leaned against him, her lips close to his ear, her hair brushing his face. "Perhaps. But isn't it good to be together when you're in love?" she whispered.

Teresa quivered under his kisses and threw back her head, arching her throat to his lips. "Don't stop, darling! Don't ever stop!" She pulled at her dress, baring one shoulder, and he found it unbelievably soft. "Darling," she crooned. "Darling!"

Fingers twined in his hair, pulling him closer. He was startled by the sound of ripping silk and stepped back, thinking he had done it. "Darling!" Her whisper was hoarse.

Jonathan stared at her in consternation. Her hands still gripped the torn bodice, freeing her breasts.

For a moment he couldn't take his eyes off them. Then he turned away. "Good Lord, Teresa!"

"No, Jontee, look at me!" She caught his hand and pressed it against her. He could feel her heart beat.

"Have you lost your mind?" he muttered.

"Yes, Jontee, yes! What is love but madness?"

Her lust turned him cold. He had never seen a woman throw away all restraint before and it disgusted him. He had already had to make excuses for her, for the grotesque yellow coach, for Salazar, whose travels she shared. At first he had not questioned her explanation of the Spaniard's position in her life. Now all these things tormented him. He'd been blind. Even the boy Cris had gibed at her. Everything fitted too well.

He tried to shut out his doubts. "Are you coming with me or are you staying with Miguel?"

She was too immersed in her need to note the change in his tone. Her body pressed against him.

"Kiss me, darling. Don't talk."

His indifference surprised him. The fever was ended. A woman he could have anytime for nothing, anybody's woman—she must have been amused by his high-minded talk of marriage. To think he'd fought clear across Texas for this!

He loosened her arms and held her helpless while his eyes searched her face. There was one last question and he wanted the answer.

"What was the reason you cried when I came to La Quinta the other day?" he demanded.

"I was so glad to see you."

"Was that something to cry over?"

"You'd been away . . ." She groped for an answer. "The times are so dangerous. I was so worried."

"I might have been ambushed. Was that it?"

"Such things happen every day."

He pushed her away. She had shared Miguel's knowledge

of Teran's errand. He had his answer. "Good-by, Teresa. I'm leaving—this time I won't come back."

She stared after him, dully. He had taken half a dozen steps before she could force herself to believe he meant it.

"Jontee!" she called. "Jontee!"

He did not turn.

Menchaca raised his shaggy brows in surprise on discovering Gutierrez present when the meeting convened the next morning. He had miscalculated Don Bernardo's courage. "No matter," thought Menchaca, "Ruiz will never vote for an *americano*. We still can outvote them."

The Mexican faction assembled early. Salazar was sleek in white stockings and richly embroidered velvet, as if dressed for triumph. Delgado and Sava were beside Menchaca, whose impatient stare turned frequently toward the door. Ruiz sat frowning and aloof, mindful that his vote would settle the issue. He faced the door and was first to see the approaching Americans. He sprang to his feet, his wide eyes revealing his astonishment. The others turned to gape. The late arrivals were bearing a cot on which lay the wounded Gaines. It had been Cecily's suggestion, after Jonathan told her how much each vote was needed.

"Por Dios! What is this?" Menchaca demanded.

"Captain Gaines didn't want to miss the meeting," Taylor said laconically.

Salazar sprang to his feet. "This is ridiculous," he objected. "Only the active officers of the army are participating in this election. Captain Gaines is in no condition to execute such responsibilities."

"None of us has a better right to be here," Perry retorted. "Gaines will vote."

Salazar eyed Ruiz. "Five Mexicans against five Americans." His tone was suggestive.

"Let's get on with the election," growled McFarland. "I want to propose a man who hasn't been mentioned before. A Spaniard—" he stressed the word—"whom we all admire. I nominate Don José Alvarez de Toledo."

Salazar was caught by surprise. He sat down abruptly.

"There seems to be some feeling here that the Americans are trying to elect one of their own number," Perry remarked. "For this reason I withdraw my name. That will leave the selection among Gutierrez, Salazar and Toledo."

Miguel made an effort to check the move. "The nominations were closed yesterday. It is too late to enter another name. If Major Perry wishes to withdraw, the only remaining candidates are Don Bernardo Gutierrez and I."

"Oh, no, you don't." Perry turned to Gutierrez as the presiding officer. "We're here to choose a leader and there must be no trickery about it. We're all free to vote for anyone we please."

Don Bernardo knew where he stood with Salazar. "Major Perry is right," he decided. "Nothing was said about closing the nominations."

"Vote!" McFarland demanded impatiently.

Toledo was elected. Francisco Ruiz would not have voted for an American but he preferred Toledo to Salazar.

Dazed by this quick change in their fortunes, Menchaca turned to his leader, his face dark with anger. Miguel's inner turmoil was as acute but he concealed it better. He had cunningly contrived each step in the long path that led to this moment. These men were all pawns in his strategy and he was measuring their weight as the design of his plan took a new shape.

"The *yanquis* win after all," he said. His smile was deceptive. He wanted none to guess his intention until after he had struck. "They have no further need for us here, Captain." He pressed Menchaca's shoulder as he passed.

Waiting wore at Teresa's nerves. The clatter of a passing horseman sent her scurrying to the window but he did not stop. She halted her pacing to glare at the clock's dragging hands. Again she flung herself on the bed. "I'll wait here till he comes. I'll not stir till I hear his step." A moment later, driven by her anxiety, she was once more flouncing from window to window. The quiet outside amazed her. She resented its calm.

Her eyes were bitter when Miguel flung himself from his

horse. "He has failed me." She uttered it aloud in a brittle, dead voice and shivered in spite of the midday heat.

She waited for him and searched her angry mind for words stormy enough to suit her temper. When he failed to appear she thought it another trick of her overwrought nerves. Her first impulse was to make him come to her, but when the crawling minutes became intolerable she went to him.

"You needn't tell me," she blazed; "I know. You've bungled it again."

"Shut up!"

"Listen to the king," she mocked in the same shrill tone. "Don't shout your orders at me. I don't believe in them any more."

His fingers bruised her shoulders as he shook her. "Shut up," he repeated. "I've too much on my mind to be bothered by you now." She started to renew her abuse but was interrupted by a sharp slap across the mouth. "Quiet," he admonished. "I warned you. A fine queen you'll make," he added contemptuously.

Menchaca's arrival interrupted the scene. "Show him in here," Miguel instructed. He seemed to have forgotten her presence.

"You took a long time." Salazar's eyes were searching. "Did you stay to make your peace with the *yanquis?*"

The captain growled in protest.

"You come fresh from a great victory that couldn't have been won without you," Salazar reminded him, "but I seem to be the only one who remembers your distinguished service. You would have been in command of the entire army now, if I'd been elected."

"We were tricked," Menchaca complained.

"Yet you control the army. I doubt if the *americanos* could muster a hundred able-bodied men. Shall we let them snatch this power from us when we should be the masters? They're powerless if we choose to act. What's your answer, Captain?" He filled Menchaca's glass from the decanter on the table.

The captain raised his goblet in a powerful paw. "I will crush them—like this." There was a tinkle of glass when his grip closed, viselike, on the fragile crystal. Red wine dripped

from his clenched fist. "Only tell me what to do," he urged. "They can't cheat us."

Miguel smiled. "Tonight we'll seize control. Muster your entire force in the presidio. First, we'll arrest Toledo and Gutierrez and proclaim the new government. Then we'll move against the *americanos*."

The plan was developed in detail. They felt sure of Sava's loyalty. Menchaca's army would overcome other opposition. The blow was timed for six o'clock, the supper hour. While the arrests were being made, other troops were to seize the presidio arsenal where the powder was stored and issued to the army only before impending action.

"With that in our hands the *americanos* will have no powder for their artillery and only a few rounds for their rifles." Menchaca chuckled. "They couldn't oppose us if there were five times as many."

Neither of them heeded Teresa's presence. She listened in silence as their coup was outlined. Miguel seemed to have forgotten her.

Toledo listened to Jonathan.

"Salazar is dangerous," the Virginian warned. "He isn't through. He'll stop at nothing."

"Then he must draw his fangs," the new governor agreed. They had no hope of winning the disgruntled Menchaca's support. It was different with Ruiz, Sava and Delgado. To each of these Toledo promptly gave an office. Francisco Ruiz was appointed alcalde of San Antonio, responsible for the restoration of order in the capital. "You'll have a free hand in civil affairs," the governor promised. "With a battalion at your disposal, I'm sure there'll be no further disorders. In addition, you will hold court each morning at ten until our new form of government is functioning."

"This will win back the confidence of the people," the new mayor promised.

Delgado was summoned next. "You played a valiant part in the Battle of Alazan," Toledo complimented him. "I feel that you've earned the right to be restored to your command permanently."

The captain thanked him.

"But you must continue to earn this confidence," the new governor went on. "I am dispatching you to La Bahia at the head of a hundred men." He explained the duties imposed upon Ruiz in San Antonio. "You'll function there in the same way," he continued. "Disorder must be stamped out immediately, but there must be no ruthlessness. Remember our first interest is to win the trust of the people. Nothing else will unite them so quickly."

Sava was sent to Nacogdoches on a similar mission.

The troops not accompanying their commanders on these hurried expeditions were transferred to Ruiz' battalion. "You will quarter your men across the river in the mission," the governor instructed. "It is best that we make no greater show of force in town than necessary."

He sent for Don Bernardo Gutierrez, but too late. The deposed governor, infuriated by his removal, had already departed for the American border.

Perry was appointed commander of the army. His first act was to station Taylor's company in the presidio to replace the native troops. "I'll feel better with the ammunition and cannon in our hands," he told the captain.

All these arrangements were accomplished within a few hours. The strong points were in the hands of men whose loyalty was beyond question; those of whom there was less certainty were transferred. Delgado was pleased with his new responsibility. He had expected no more from Salazar.

Sava was more hesitant. He rode first to La Quinta in the hope of consulting Don Miguel, but was unable to see him. Salazar had left word he was not to be disturbed during his conference with Menchaca. Sava proceeded on his mission, unaware of their plot.

Menchaca and Salazar rode to the presidio in search of their confederates. They discovered the new dispositions when they were challenged at the gate by an American sentry. The captain was angered at this impertinence.

"I'm Menchaca," he growled and started to ride on through.

The guard raised his rifle. "I don't care who you are, you've got to have an order to pass here."

The captain lost some of his assurance. These *americanos* were unpredictable. "I'm in command of these troops," he snarled.

"I take my orders from Captain Taylor."

"Send for Captain Sava," Salazar suggested. "He's the man we want to see."

"He ain't here."

"Delgado then."

"I don't know where you'd find him. You might try 'crosst the river. Thar's troops over yonder in the old mission."

The two conspirators sought out Ruiz in his new headquarters. Once their identity was made known he came out at once. His greeting was affable. "There are great changes in the making," he said. "It's what we've needed for a long time."

"Where's Sava? What's become of Delgado?" Menchaca was in no humor to exchange pleasantries.

"They're on their way to their new posts by now." The alcalde explained what had happened.

"What!" the captain's voice was a surly roar. "These officers were under my command. Who dared send them away without consulting me?"

"Governor Toledo ordered it." The questioning antagonized the mayor. "Major Perry is in command of the army. If you have any complaint, I suggest you take it up with him. I'm principally concerned with civil matters."

"These *americanos* have lost no time in seizing control," Salazar interrupted, anxious to divert the conversation before his companion affronted Ruiz further.

"Americanos?" The question was filled with surprise. "Is Toledo an *americano*? He's our governor. Am I? I'm the alcalde of San Antonio. Are Sava and Delgado? They hold similar positions. Major Perry is the only *americano* who has been recognized at all, and where could we find a man who has done more to earn his honor?"

Salazar listened with foreboding. The success of his cabal depended on the missing captains and their troops. Even the arsenal was in Perry's hands. While he had been devising, Toledo had acted. Unless Menchaca could reassert his authority over the troops, the cause was hopeless.

"Has Toledo gone mad?" he demanded. "Has he rewarded everyone but the man who defeated Elizondo? What of Menchaca? What's his position in this new government?"

"We all fought Elizondo," the alcalde reminded him. "These are questions for you to ask Toledo himself. You'll find him at the governor's palace."

"But Menchaca still commands all the Mexican troops," Miguel persisted. "You are still subject to his orders."

"Only the governor can answer your questions," Ruiz said.

"Damnation!" Menchaca's furious bellow arrested the attention of half a hundred soldiers who turned to watch curiously. "These are my men just as you're one of my captains. Do you deny that?"

"I'm the alcalde," Ruiz repeated abruptly. "These men were placed at my command by Toledo's orders. I recognize no other authority."

The irate commander turned to the troops. "Arrest this man," he shouted, pointing at Ruiz.

Menchaca's popularity had waned recently. His men had taken pride in the fact that he was one of them, and in his undisputed courage, feeling that it reflected credit on them since he was a man of the people. But he had been quick to forget his origin. He wore silk stockings now and swaggered about in a uniform of sorts. Deluded by his egotism, which Salazar cunningly fanned, he had long since ceased to be the friendly fellow they had known.

They hesitated, uncertain of their duty. "Arrest him, I say," Menchaca roared again, glaring at them through bloodshot eyes. His bluster was his undoing; it emphasized his impotence when contrasted with Ruiz' authoritative dignity.

"Remove him," Ruiz ordered abruptly.

They hesitated no longer. They wore derisive grins on their faces as they advanced. Menchaca stared incredulously and braced himself for the conflict, but Salazar had no intention of permitting him to be so discredited before the army.

"Come—" he took his companion by the arm—"this is not the time to dispute them. It isn't our day."

In spite of his apparent calm, Miguel's step faltered as they walked away.

Chapter 17

Invasion Ends an Idyl

LAWLESSNESS ENDED abruptly. Toledo's energy did not falter. The junta was revived as a lawmaking body, courts were established and a land office again set up to record the soldiers' claims in fulfillment of Magee's promise. An election was promised to determine the final form of the new government and once more there was an influx of Americans. This new tide reached its crest in late July when seventy-six arrived in a single day. "We'll have more Americans than Mexicans by election time," Perry assured Jonathan. "The republic will win. There's no longer doubt of it."

With the return of peaceful times, Cecily's thoughts again turned to the projected colony. The grants had been duly registered at the land office and she was keen to start. Three wagons were stored with their necessities. Cecily's long-cherished furniture shared space with the tools they had collected and a generous store of supplies. This time they meant to stay. The wagons formed a slow procession. Cecily was seated in one beside her father. Cris and O'Rourke drove the others. Jess and Giles rode ahead with Jonty as they left San Antonio.

Cecily first glimpsed the place when shadows lay on the hills and the long day's haze touched the wide plains beyond; a strip of green marked the river's lazy course.

"That's Marsten's Hill." Jonathan pointed out the landmarks. "I'll be right across the river from you. That grove of oaks yonder is where I'm going to build my house."

Cecily took a deep breath. "No wonder you wanted to come back." Her eyes eagerly explored the scene. "Sometimes I've had my doubts about this country," she added, "we've paid such a price for it. We'll have to make a good life here, Jonty, if it's going to be worth its cost."

They decided to join together in building one cabin which would serve them as headquarters. This would be the Marsten house, situated on its hill facing the river. It was heavy work but there were six of them to share it, with Cecily relieving them of the camp chores. The timber was cut along the river bottom, the dressed logs dragged to the site by straining horses. O'Rourke was the teamster, his missing arm no handicap at this task.

They used a design familiar along American frontiers. Actually, they built two cabins, eighteen feet square, set in a line twenty feet apart, and covered with a single roof so that, when completed, the rooms were separated by a covered gallery. The timbers were square hewn and notched to fit snugly, and there was a fireplace at each end. One room was the kitchen, soon made homelike with Cissy's familiar furniture. It was the dining and living room too, as well as Ben Marsten's bedroom. The second chamber was Cecily's. There were pallets for the others in the long loft above, reached by steps from the kitchen.

They were hard days but they were filled with planning and doing. San Antonio and the long campaign seemed very far away, until suddenly their work was brought to an end by the arrival of a messenger. The men were in the river bottom cutting timber when he galloped in. Cecily summoned them with a rifle shot. They came hurriedly.

"It's a messenger from Perry," Jonathan declared when he saw the drooping horse outside the cabin.

"Bad news," Jess added glumly. "He's ridden hard."

He was right. A new Spanish army was invading Texas under General Arredondo. Toledo was gathering his forces for the struggle. Messengers had been hurried to La Bahia and Nacogdoches to call in every available man, and the outlying settlements were being warned. McFarland, whose scouts had reported the advance, sent word that the Spaniards were destroying every house in their path.

"Better take along what you can," the messenger advised. "It probably wouldn't be here when you get back."

In spite of his warning, they decided against trying to remove their belongings. Time was too pressing and wagons would delay them. Equipment they could not store in the house

they concealed with the vehicles in a brake along the river bottom. Their preparations were speedily completed; within two hours they were riding for San Antonio, driving the spare horses before them.

Memory of Teresa still bothered Jonathan. Not in the same way—his craving for her was gone—but he found it impossible to close his mind to all his recollections. One question remained uncertain. Was she Miguel's mistress? If not, had his departure caused her to turn to the Spaniard? The thought tormented him.

"I can't abandon a girl I once loved to a man like Salazar," he told himself. He had money. He would give her enough to get back to New Orleans, he decided. She need not depend on Salazar for anything.

This was in his mind when he went to La Quinta the morning after his return. Maria answered the door, and tried to close it when she saw who it was.

"She is not home, señor," she protested, when he pushed his way in.

"She'll see me this time. Tell her I'm here," Jonathan insisted.

The voices were clearly audible in the dining room. For an instant hope flamed in Teresa's eyes.

"Sounds like you have a caller," Miguel said. "Who can it be?"

"I don't know."

"You know very well and so do I. Come here, Teresa."

She stood up, facing him sullenly. "What do you want?"

He eyed her sheer breakfast robe. She wore little else. "I'm not going to beat you—though you probably deserve it. Come here!"

She hesitated, uncertain whether she dared defy him.

"Do I have to make all the advances?" He chuckled as he rounded the table. His fingers closed on her wrist. "I only want to kiss you."

He sat in her chair and pulled her after him, into his lap. Then, before she could guess his purpose, he jerked open her gown and stripped it from her shoulders.

"In here, Maria!" he shouted. "Show the fellow in here if he wants to see my wench."

Jonathan halted in the doorway. Teresa was sprawled in Miguel's lap, his kisses covering her body. Her eyes blazed, she writhed and her hands were clutched in his hair. Trailing on the floor was the saffron robe that once had haunted his memory. He didn't wait to see more. He turned quickly and strode from the house.

"Damn you! Damn you!" Teresa finally managed to jerk back Miguel's head. She beat her fists against him and cried in her fury.

He shielded his face from her blows and laughed.

Toledo raised a formidable force, numbering more than three thousand men. There were eight hundred and fifty Americans under Perry, a larger force than Kemper had commanded. McFarland was sent among the Indians again. He raised six hundred warriors, most of them Lipans. The bulk of the force was Mexican. Since the institution of the new government the native population had grown strong in its loyalty. There were seventeen hundred of these volunteers.

Each of the old leaders was in a place of authority. Delgado and Sava had been recalled, and Menchaca restored to a command, his doughty services at Alazan not forgotten. The native troops were divided into two regiments, Menchaca heading one, aided by Sava, Ruiz leading the other, seconded by Delgado. McFarland's Indians were organized as a separate unit. An American named Young, from Taylor's company, proved himself expert in the handling of cannon and was elevated to a lieutenancy in charge of artillery. Ammunition was short and again only the six best pieces were selected for use. Another American, a newcomer named Bullard, whose abilities had attracted attention, was promoted to the rank of captain and made Toledo's aide.

The Americans were formed into two battalions under Taylor and Gaines, now fully recovered from his wounds, with Jonathan once more his second in command. Wooden lances were a thing of the past; there were bayonets to spare from the spoils of past victories.

Miguel Salazar glumly watched the bustle of preparation in which he had no part. His schemes had all collapsed in the face of Toledo's energy. At first, contemptuous of other men's abilities, he regarded the setback as only a temporary interruption against which his superior talents would prevail. Menchaca was bewildered by the swift events which had tumbled him from authority, but Salazar returned to his devices. Pedro Teran was gone but his cutthroats were loosed again to spread terror in the outlying districts. Once more he used the sly Luiz as an emissary to stir up lawlessness. But Ruiz organized a posse that ran the bandits down. Three of them were slain in the battle that followed and the others faced immediate trial in the newly established courts. Justice was summary: they were hanged. Luiz' fate was even more swift. He was shot down while trying to escape from the scene of a robbery.

"Just as well," mused his master when he heard the news. "The fellow was a coward; he would have talked too much."

But as frustration followed frustration, Miguel grew more saturnine. Teresa contributed to his vexation. She alternated between sullen discontent and stormy rebellion. One day she was a sharp-tongued vixen reminding him of failure. The next, she would turn her back on the wreckage of their dreams, begging him to take her back to New Orleans.

"Even if you were a king here, what would you have?" she demanded. "I'm sick of the squalid place. Take me back, Miguel, back to the cities again." From her windows she caught glimpses of a life which reminded her too much of Motin.

When Menchaca was restored to command, Miguel took new hope. "This is our opportunity," he told the captain. "With an army at your back, who's to prevent us from seizing power, just as we planned?"

"First, we defeat Arredondo," was the practical reply.

"But after that," Miguel insisted, "will they forget you again? They call for Menchaca when there's a battle to be won, but they forget him when the fighting's over. That must not happen again."

The captain scowled at the wine, red in his glass. "You're right, *viejo*. This time there'll be a different end to the matter."

Toledo had no intention of waiting to be attacked. It had

been the revolution's misfortune to lose its most aggressive warriors, but the new governor, while not a soldier, possessed the spirit of Magee. He was determined to drive the invader out. Perry agreed in principle but he wanted to delay. Each day re-enforcements swelled his command. When a scout reported the enemy only a long day's march away, the governor took immediate action. The word came at midmorning on August seventeenth; by noon the army was marching south.

Kirk's Scouts had returned to their old quarters in La Villita. There was scant time for good-bys before they were off.

"We'll be back in a couple of days," Cris assured his sister. "They've never whipped us yet."

"You'd think they'd be gettin' a mite discouraged by now," Giles Brady added. "If somebody had licked me three or four times, I'd be a leetle leary of pickin' a scrap with him. Won't these *gachupines* ever larn?"

"Oh, I'm not worried," Cecily replied. "This will surely be the last of the battles. Soon we'll all be going home again."

To Jonathan she revealed more anxiety. "Take good care of them, Jonty. That's what I asked you before, isn't it?"

"I'll do my best," he promised. "Don't you worry. We'll be headed back for Marsten Hill before you've had time to miss us." And then, surprisingly, he kissed her on the lips.

Jonathan crossed the Medina River with twenty men and rode some miles south in the hope of capturing prisoners, but without success. He saw enemy patrols but each was too strong for him.

He reported back at sunset.

"It's as large an army as we met before," he told Toledo, "and they're better led. There are no stragglers and cavalry is alert on their flanks. This Arredondo seems to know his business."

"Where are they?" the governor demanded.

"I'd guess their camp isn't more than five miles from ours tonight."

Toledo had halted his army on the north bank of the Medina. Every precaution was taken. Pickets were thrown out

across the river and the sentries were on the alert. The army's appearance was more martial than at any time since Magee's death, and this encouraged Jonathan.

"I believe Toledo knows what he's doing," he told his companions before departing for the meeting of officers which the governor had called.

It was a council to determine the plan of battle. The governor made his proposal first. "I want to trap them when they're crossing the river," he began. "The passage is narrow. If they try to widen their front they'll hit deep water. We can command the ford with artillery and open up on them after half their force has passed. We'll divide and destroy them piecemeal."

He outlined the details of his suggestion. Strong companies of riflemen up and down the stream would cut off any support Arredondo might try to lend his advance elements.

"What becomes of the others?" Menchaca protested. "That still leaves Arredondo to deal with."

"With half his army destroyed he won't be such a dangerous foe," Toledo explained.

"I don't like it." The captain was blunt in his protest. "It leaves us two battles to fight instead of one. I favor pouncing on them at once, destroying their whole army. That's the way we did at Alazan . . . but of course you weren't there." His manner was truculent. He would have opposed any plan endorsed by Toledo, but he found unexpected support for his views.

"We'd still have to cross the river to get at Arredondo, no matter how successful our trap proved to be," Perry said. "The dangers of that crossing work both ways. If his advance is as careful as Jonty describes it, he'll throw his cavalry across first. We'd still have his artillery to deal with and it could cut us to pieces in the ford."

"There would be no necessity for charging the river," Toledo pointed out. "That would be the enemy's problem in trying to reach us."

"He'd have too much sense to try it again after one taste of it," Menchaca growled. "He'd turn around and head back for Mexico. I don't want him to escape."

"In that event we could pursue and destroy him," Toledo persisted.

"Menchaca is right." Perry twisted his ear thoughtfully. "I don't want to lead my men across a stream in the face of enemy artillery."

"Don't you see? You're arguing for my plan. I want to place Arredondo in the very position that has you worried. Have you a better suggestion?"

"I'd advise crossing the stream at dawn," the American replied, "and advancing until we find a suitable spot for this ambush of yours. I like the rest of your scheme. Once we trap the head of their column, it'll be Rosillo and Alazan over again. We'll teach them a lesson they'll never forget. It will put a stop to these invasions."

Toledo stared in perplexity at his officers. "And if anything goes wrong," he said uneasily, "we have the river at our backs. Ours will be the force that's cut to pieces."

"Those of us who've had experience aren't looking for a road to the rear." Menchaca's voice held a jeering note. "Perhaps you'd better leave the fighting to soldiers."

The governor flushed but restrained his temper. "We'll put it to a vote," he decided. "I still favor the plan I've described. I believe we should take every sensible precaution to make victory certain."

"Don't worry, governor, we have the measure of these *gachupines*. We aren't taking unnecessary risks." Taylor expressed the feeling of the American veterans. They had faced desperate odds on more than one occasion, but always they had won. None doubted their ability to do so now.

Only Bullard and Ruiz voted with Toledo. Menchaca had his way.

Chapter 18

Thinning Ranks

WHILE TOLEDO'S officers argued, a similar council was held in the royalist camp but there Arredondo's authority permitted no dispute. His two principal aides were Elizondo, who had a remnant of only four hundred men left from his defeated army, and Major Manuel Zambrano, who had wrested San Antonio from the republicans in the early days of the Hidalgo Revolution and was familiar with the territory. Arredondo had chosen the site of battle on favorable ground, and throughout the night his army was busy setting up concealed fortifications. These took the form of a V, open on the side facing the Americans. He intended that the bulk of his troops should fight behind an impregnable abatis. Along the walls of the V a breastwork of logs was constructed, bristling with sharpened stakes. Freshly cut brush cunningly masked these defenses.

He had eleven pieces of artillery, most of them heavy, concealed where their cross fire would be concentrated on a foe at the mouth of his ambush. His problem was to lure Toledo's army into the jaws of the trap, and this was the subject of discussion.

"You will advance with your full force until you make contact with them," he told Elizondo. "Once you meet their main army they'll be too strong for you. That's when you'll fall back. Your retreat must be orderly; they must be drawn into the snare."

"There's danger that I'll be cut off," Elizondo objected. "My force is too small for the role."

"It will be Zambrano's task to support you. He will prevent that," the commander continued. "I have held back two pieces of light artillery for him. When they open up, you'll know you're directly in front of the main position. That will be your

last determined stand. As you withdraw, your troops will swing to the right, Zambrano's to the left, letting the enemy charge through. From that point the battle will be in my hands. Do you understand your orders perfectly?"

Each officer repeated his instructions and the details were rehearsed once more before Arredondo was satisfied.

Toledo advanced with caution. The crossing of the Medina was accomplished uneventfully at dawn. A thin line of scouts under Jonathan Kirk led the way while the main force, organized in battalions, followed in four columns. The American battalions protected the flanks, Gaines on the right, Taylor on the left. The center was divided also, for readier handling, Menchaca commanding one half, Ruiz the other. These were the Mexican troops, seventeen hundred strong. Young's artillery was directly behind them. In support came McFarland with his six hundred Indians.

The first contact was between the opposing picket lines. Jonathan advanced cautiously after apprising Toledo of the situation. The commander hurried forward. With him were Perry, Bullard, Menchaca and Ruiz. The site seemed favorable to them, with the enemy concentrated in a shallow valley to their front.

"We have the best position," Perry declared. "We'll drive 'em down the slope." The ground ahead was fairly open, the opposing skirmishers firing through the tall grass. About a mile beyond stood a dark wood and, advancing from this direction, came Elizondo's main force. The Texas army had advanced about a mile south of the river.

"Engage them now," Perry advised, "where we have them in the open. You can watch developments from here and keep us informed."

From the vantage of the high ground the battlefield would spread before Toledo like a chessboard.

The skirmishers were drawn in and attached to Gaines's column as the action began; the disposition of the troops was otherwise unchanged. Young's artillery opened fire from the hillside. The Spaniards fought stubbornly, but were outmatched. Menchaca and Ruiz pressed them back while the Americans threatened their flanks. The retreat became more

rapid. When half the distance to the forest was covered, Toledo saw Zambrano hurrying up re-enforcements. The *gachupines* had been compelled to alter their plan in order to avert catastrophe for Elizondo. The supporting force had been drawn out of its fixed position.

"They have artillery!" Bullard exclaimed. "This is their main body."

With Zambrano's help, Elizondo made a determined stand. Their artillery halted Menchaca until it was silenced by Young's accurate fire. The Texas leaders were convinced they now were engaging the full enemy power, and the royalists were wavering.

Menchaca ordered a charge as soon as the cannon before him were put out of action. Ruiz was quick to support him. The two columns surged forward with fixed bayonets, unchecked by the scattered volley which greeted them.

"They run! They run!" Menchaca shouted. "Keep after them." He was determined the shattered line should have no time to re-form. He was at his best in such headlong action. His bravery was conspicuous as he led the advance. Ruiz had asked the privilege of carrying the green flag into battle with his column and it fluttered forward now, as his line matched Menchaca's rush. The enemy fell back rapidly; their artillery was captured.

Zambrano rallied his forces at the forest's edge. This had been the position originally chosen for his stand. The fight here was brief. Menchaca, tasting victory, had not halted his drive; his bayonets ripped at the tottering ranks. The *gachupine* flight grew precipitate. Toledo's entire army joined the charge, the units not yet in action eager for a part in the triumph. All caution was abandoned. McFarland's Indians broke their formation and bounded forward, lusting to be in at the kill.

Arredondo's careful plan had been disarranged in the early stages of the battle. Zambrano had been drawn out of position, and what had been meant of a stubborn retreat had turned into a rout. But the royal commander refused to forsake his fortifications to rescue his subordinates and their panic helped rather than hindered him. The Texas force, hurled forward to

cut down a retreating foe, headed straight for his ambush.

Only Toledo still clung to the caution for which his officers chided him. All his intelligence had warned him against a far stronger force than any he had engaged. He galloped forward now, trying vainly to check the scrambling assault.

"Halt your men!" he ordered Menchaca. "They're getting out of hand. Re-form your line."

If the captain heard him he gave no sign. "Follow me!" he roared, and lunged on in pursuit.

"No! Back! Back!" Toledo strove in vain to turn them.

In converging upon the scurrying enemy, all four Texas columns had advanced straight into the mouth of Arredondo's trap. The general had watched imperturbably while a part of his army was cut to fragments. Now he claimed vengeance. His artillery erupted deafeningly, drowning the harsh rattle of musketry with its blast. Hot metal flailed the Texas ranks from the whole length of the hidden abatis. Flame spewed as the Spanish guns continued their deadly coughing. The charging line faltered. Death blazed from both sides. There was no want of bravery here but the orders were conflicting.

"Back! Fall back!" Toledo shouted.

"Follow me!" cried Menchaca.

Each commander sought to rally his own company. The wisdom of Toledo's counsel had been proved but his efforts resulted only in confusion. Taylor, on the left, obeyed the command. His company fell back in good order, extricating itself from the trap. Menchaca tried to charge and Ruiz supported him. Perry joined Gaines's column on the right. "Retreat, hell!" he roared. "We've never been licked yet and we won't start now." The company held its ground but the cross fire plowed gaping furrows in its ranks.

Menchaca led straight for the abatis, heedless of the metal that buzzed around him, tearing at the shrubbery which concealed the enemy bulwark as he strove to pierce the line. His men followed. Momentarily there seemed to be a chance of success until the captain fell. Then the charge wavered, its first ranks vanishing under the searing fire.

Ruiz tried. Men rallied to his green flag as it gallantly advanced, but there was too much death in that ghastly angle.

The ground was slippery and red now. The column reeled under the hammering, swayed uncertainly as it tried to close up the shattered ranks, and then broke. The thunder followed them as they fled. Toledo was there, trying to check their panic, but his mounted figure made an easy target. Bullard extricated him from beneath his dead horse and tried to drag him to safety.

"How badly are you hurt?" he asked.

The governor himself did not know; one arm hung useless and there was blood on his tunic. "Rally the troops," he ordered. "Re-form them beyond the woods. I'll look after myself."

Bullard tried. But it was too late. He was able to gather only a handful of dazed men.

When Taylor saw the center crumple, his men had withdrawn to safety, obedient to orders. There was no longer anyone in direction of the field. He could see Perry and Gaines standing their ground on the right. He had no idea of abandoning his friends. The disposition of the enemy was now clear. He ordered a charge in an effort to sweep around the left end of the royalist breastworks and roll up their line. His company was intact and his men went forward with a wild yell.

McFarland charged too, his Indians proving unexpectedly stanch. With them came Young and his artillerymen, and Bullard with his rallied few. They forced their way to Perry's side and the battle resolved itself into two separate conflicts. Perry's mixed force on the right and Taylor's on the left were two islands of resistance in a hostile sea, for, by this time, Zambrano and Elizondo had their troops in hand again, and had closed in on the rear, making a triangle of the V and engulfing the Americans. It was the *gachupines'* turn to charge. Men fought with every weapon at hand, first with rifles, then bayonets, finally knives. Kirk's company was on the right, grimly fending off the crowding enemy.

"Stick together," Jonathan cautioned, "and we'll come out of this all right. We've been in tight spots before."

They fought in a grim little knot. Giles Brady had been the first to fall. That was early in the battle, under the scourge of the *gachupine* artillery.

When Perry realized that the unequal odds threatened to overwhelm his command, he decided to join Taylor. He ordered a charge straight across the base of the bloody triangle. Its audacity was aided by the fact that Arredondo could no longer use his cannon without endangering his own swarming infantry. With their forces united, the Americans took heart, but once more the determined foe closed in. McFarland's Indians, steadfast until now, measured the hopeless odds and began to fall away. Their leader tried to rally them but a bullet ended his effort. Soon there were none left but Americans, and half of them had fallen.

O'Rourke, his pistols empty, was savagely swinging a broken rifle against the advancing ranks. Its butt crunched as it found a target, but other bayonets pressed forward before the Irishman could recover his balance. Ben Marsten saw his peril and lunged to clear a protecting path before his friend, until the red blades felled him. O'Rourke saw it happen. He was a snarling, howling madman as he straddled his fallen comrade and tried to buffet back the cruel tide. The long bayonets were resistless. They cut him down there.

Young was dead. Bullard and Gaines were both severely wounded, and blood trickled unheeded down Perry's face. More than five hundred of the Americans had perished on that grim field and still they resisted stubbornly. But the issue was no longer in doubt. The attack was pressed relentlessly, and each time they shook it off their numbers thinned.

Until Marsten fell, Jonathan resisted with unshaken resolution. "How can I face Cissy now?" he asked himself in despair, and for an instant her eyes seemed to reproach him through the red mist of battle. He fought then with a stormy fury and the grisly havoc seemed to fit his relentless temper. Once Cris exposed himself needlessly and Jonathan thrust him back. "Stay behind me," he barked, and to himself he added, "I've got to take one of them home."

The desperation of their position had become clear before Perry reluctantly gave his final order. "It's time we cut our way out of here," he shouted. "Stick together and follow me."

Jonathan glanced about to locate his friends. Jess Leeman

still fought steadily on his left, but Cris had disappeared. "Cris!" he yelled. "Cris, where are you?"

The boy's reply was inaudible above the din. It was Jess who saw him on the ground, his shirt slowly turning red.

"How bad you hurt, boy?"

Cris' face was white but he was able to sit up. "Not too bad, I reckon, Jess."

Jonathan dragged the lad to his feet and slipped a supporting arm under his shoulder. "Can you walk?"

"I think so."

"Then hang on to me. We're getting out of here."

Their final dash clove through the surprised royalist line, unprepared for such weird tactics from a tottering foe. Perry led the way with berserk energy, followed by a thin, determined rank of demons. They tried to carry some of their wounded with them. Gaines was supported between two of his men; Cris staggered behind Jonathan, clinging to his belt. The woods extended westward toward a curve of the river in a widening strip and they clung to its cover as they retreated, sullenly driving off the first hurried efforts at pursuit.

It was noon when the battle was broken off. The first skirmishers had engaged before six that morning and Zambrano had been driven back at seven. The battle at the scene of the ambush had begun at seven thirty and lasted four and a half hours. Casualties in all units had been heavy, but the American losses had been staggering. Of the eight hundred and fifty men Perry had led that morning, more than seven hundred were left dead on the field, and the long afternoon was before them with a relentless foe at their heels. Of the Texas leaders, Toledo had fallen and his fate was uncertain; Menchaca, McFarland, Young and Sava were dead, and most of the others wounded.

Aware of the extent of the catastrophe, Perry's first thought was to save as many of his men as possible. The survivors were too few to make a stand. Moving as a unit, they would invite attack. He directed them to break up into small groups, believing in this way they had the best chance of eluding pursuit. These bands were to make their way to the river, hide until nightfall, and then begin their flight to Nacogdoches.

None of them was mounted, there were no provisions for the long trip, but it seemed the only desperate chance of escape.

A number of the fugitives made their way toward San Antonio, some hoping to rejoin the remnants of Toledo's army in defense of the town, others in search of horses and provisions.

Jonathan and Jess remained together, half supporting the stumbling Cris. They were part of a larger group for a time but Jess counseled against this. "I'd ruther we took our chances by ourselves," he told Jonathan. "I can hole up in these woods fer a month agin the whole royal army. I can hide the three of us, but not this many. Let's split up."

They left the others at the river's edge and scurried along its winding bank until the woodsman found a hiding place that satisfied him. It was under a shelving bank which protected them from above, its approach screened by a clump of willows. They bandaged Cris's wound with strips of his tattered shirt. A musket ball had pierced his left shoulder but the wound was high and they were encouraged by its appearance.

"Shucks, I've had skeeter bites wusser'n that," Jess declared, dampening the bandage to ease the fever.

All through the afternoon there was sporadic firing through the woods as Arredondo's cavalry hunted down escaping men. Once a troop galloped close by, on the bank above, but it did not stop. Far to the north the volleys persisted with greater regularity. That was the route to San Antonio and they tried to understand the sound.

"I guess someone's still fightin'," Jess suggested hopefully.

Jonathan was tortured by the thought of Cecily waiting for their return. It was going to be hard to tell her about her father. But a girl alone in a captured city! He must find a way to reach her.

"I've got to get to town, Jess," he announced. "I'm thinking of Cissy. We've got to get her out of there."

Chapter 19

The Rape of San Antonio

San Antonio awaited news of the battle with confidence. Faith in Toledo was great, and buoyed up by the conviction that the Americans were unbeatable. "Before, we've always been outnumbered," was the current of opinion, "but look at our army this time. It's more than three thousand strong."

The battle's first refugees reached the town on lathered horses before the obstinate Americans had left the field. Numbered crowds thronged the streets, saying little at first, unable to comprehend the disaster. They grew clamorous as bedraggled troops began to follow the first messengers, and panic spread. Each new arrival added somber details to the story: Menchaca was dead; Sava and Toledo had fallen; the *americanos* had fought bravely but all had perished. No leaders were left to rally them.

Cecily waited with the rest. She didn't credit the early rumors fully. There had been no Americans among the fugitives. She took heart from this. But as the heavy hours dragged on and she saw the general terror mount, her fear grew.

"Jonty will bring them back," she kept assuring herself. "He always has."

Near sundown Toledo arrived. He had three wounds and was borne on a crude litter. The crowds were silent as he was carried to the governor's palace. Here was one who was better dead on the battlefield. Others might be spared but execution would certainly be the fate of the rebellious chief.

He knew their thoughts. He had no illusions about his fate should he fall into Arredondo's hands. He ordered a carriage at once.

"But you aren't able to travel," the physician protested. "You'll die on the road."

"Then I'll die trying," was the retort. "If we can rally a force at Nacogdoches, we haven't lost yet. What's the news from Perry?"

There still was no word from the Americans. Toledo penned a letter to General Arredondo.

"You have won an honorable victory," he wrote. "I ask you in the name of the king you represent not to tarnish that honor by revenging yourself upon a helpless population. As the head of this government, I accept full responsibility for all that has occurred. Let our destinies be settled between the leaders and their armies. I entreat you to spare an innocent people from a punishment they do not merit."

He left the note on his desk before he was driven away. He was mercifully unconscious by the time the carriage had bounced a mile over the long, rough trail to Nacogdoches.

Salazar expected victory. "Menchaca will come back a hero and I'll be master of this place yet," he told Teresa. "The collapse of my lieutenants frustrated me before. With him strong again I'll overthrow Toledo and drive out the American rabble regardless of the cost. This is our chance, Teresa. Arredondo doesn't know it but he's fighting for me."

First news of the disaster stunned them.

"No, no, it can't be true," Teresa cried.

"Menchaca dead!" Miguel went stiff with shock. As soon as he could pull himself together he slipped out into the crowd and was gone an hour, hunting further information. When he returned he seemed not to notice the storm of Teresa's bitterness. "You'll get your wish now," he told her wearily. "We'll return to New Orleans."

"Shall I tell José to harness the horses?"

"Later," he said. "There's no need for haste." But she ordered the carriage. Time was slipping by.

It was six o'clock when the Americans came. The news rustled through the town from lip to lip. Cecily heard it and forced her way through the mob. Perhaps Jonathan was there; she would hear word of her father and Cris. But she saw no familiar faces. Her trepidation increased as she noted how few they were—only forty-six and fully half of them wounded—survivors of Taylor's battalion.

"Where are Kirk's Scouts?" Cecily asked a soldier. "Did you see any of them?"

"They war with Gaines. That's all I know. If any of 'em got away they crossed the river and headed east with Perry."

Cecily repeated her questions over and over. But the answer was always the same. When she turned away she stumbled and her eyes burned with unshed tears. Some of them must have escaped, she kept telling herself. She clutched at this straw. That was it: they were with Perry falling back toward Nacogdoches. And yet she couldn't convince herself. "They wouldn't have left me here alone. If any of them are alive, they'll come back for me."

The few American families were joining the flight. Two women invited Cecily to go with them but she shook her head.

"I must wait," she answered. "I must be here when my men come back. How else could they find me?"

Salazar threw off his lethargy when he learned of the leaderless Americans.

"It's time we started," Teresa urged. "Until I heard the Americans were cut to pieces I still had hope, but that's gone now. We must get out. The Spaniards will be here any moment."

"How far do you think we'd get?" Salazar's smile was derisive. "Arredondo's cavalry will catch these fugitives and herd them back like so many sheep. There's no escape that way."

"What are we going to do? What mercy do you expect from the *gachupines?*"

"I think I know the answer now." Miguel's confidence was returning. "Leave everything to me." He hurried from the house.

His was the first authority displayed in San Antonio and it inspired confidence. "Retreat is out of the question," he told the American company. "The *gachupine* cavalry would cut you down. What's needed is a strong defense until Perry has time to rally the army. We'll fight behind stone walls. It's our only hope. If they catch us in the open we haven't a chance."

His final argument was the most persuasive. "If we just had

enough men to hold the presidio, they'd never drive us out," one man said. "But there are only forty-six of us."

"I've got a better position than that," Salazar promised. "La Quinta is just as strong, and smaller. Fifty men could stand off an army. If we can hold it a week Perry will be back to help us."

Thirty-two survivors of Menchaca's command took courage from their resolution and joined them. The crowd cheered feebly as Salazar led the little force away.

Teresa watched them occupy her garden with consternation. "Have you lost your mind?" Her voice was shrill with panic as she faced Miguel. "What chance have these scarecrows against an army?"

"None," he assured her. "No more than we'd have, had we joined the panic-stricken throng on the road to Nacogdoches. But their presence will save your pretty neck." He was his old assured self. "Where's José? I want him to saddle my horse at once."

Elizondo was within sight of San Antonio when he halted his cavalry. He had unpleasant memories of the resistance encountered there before. The narrow streets and stone buildings offered traps unless he was wary. A royalist picket raised his weapon as a horseman came galloping toward them.

"Hold your fire," the colonel instructed. "This seems to be a friend. The rebels are all traveling in the other direction."

"Por Dios! I'm glad to see you," Salazar exclaimed when within hailing distance. "I'm Miguel Salazar of Mexico City. These rebellious dogs have held me prisoner because of my loyalty to the king."

"Very surprising." Elizondo's shrewd eyes measured his visitor. "How did you keep your head on your shoulders? I thought the loyalists all were murdered with Salcedo."

"A terrible business!" Miguel exclaimed. "I was spared only because my niece was with me. I insisted on bringing her to Mexico and the others were being sent to New Orleans. I'm sure it was she who saved me."

"I expect to find many new loyalists," the officer commented dryly. "Our swords are very persuasive."

"If necessary, my connections in Mexico City will vouch for me—" Miguel betrayed no uneasiness—"but my actions are the best witness. I have trapped the remaining garrison in my house. You will meet no resistance elsewhere and I have come to turn these men over to you."

"Excellent! How strong is this force?"

"There are seventy-eight in all, forty-six Americans and thirty-two Mexicans."

"In one house?" Elizondo looked skeptical.

"There's a walled garden where most of them have taken refuge, but it is exposed on the side facing the river," Miguel explained. "As for those in the house, I told them I was going in search of re-enforcements. They'll suspect nothing when I appear with some of your men. We'll be admitted without question."

The chill of Elizondo's manner grew less marked. "You have done well," he admitted. "I hardly think you'd have dared come to me with any trickery. First, we'll arrange to surprise your house."

One hundred men were placed at Salazar's disposal for the task. They entered town from the east, the direction the fugitives had taken. Sixty men were dismounted with instructions to proceed down the river bank until opposite La Quinta, where they could pour a destructive fire into the garden. Forty rode boldly to the house with Miguel in the lead. When he was recognized, the door was thrown open. They thought he brought help. The dozen Americans in the hall were overpowered and the house captured before the defenders realized what was going on. The men in the garden were trapped. From the front, their position was commanded by the building, while their rear was exposed to the rifles across the river. The west walls at the sides, which they had hoped to defend, penned them in. When the hopelessness of their position was made clear, they surrendered. There was no resistance elsewhere. The only men remaining were too old to bear arms.

Arredondo's orders for the punishment of the town were ruthless. Except for two families whose loyalty to the crown was beyond question, his wrath was to be visited on the entire community. Pillage and burn! The women were to be aban-

doned to the lust of his army. No restraints would be imposed save those necessary for victualing, for he intended to use this as a base while he rid the rest of the province of rebels. Three hundred women were wanted to grind corn. That order was specific. As for the others, he was merciless. "We shall teach these rebels an enduring lesson in vengeance."

Zealous Elizondo loosed his troops on the town before his chief arrived. A large share of them had been recruited from the half-tamed Indian tribes of northern Mexico. The atrocities began at once.

Before the soldiers reached La Villita, the frantic screaming of women warned Cecily. A terror-stricken girl who had fled across the river gasped out the story. "They're coming! They're coming!" she sobbed. Behind her rose a barbarous din, hoarse shouts mingled with wailing.

"I'll hide you." Cecily dragged the girl indoors. "You can't escape by running."

There was a trap in the ceiling, giving entrance to a tiny loft. The two girls reached it by placing a chair on a table, but this marked their hiding place too well. Cecily clambered down for a broom. The brutish noise drew closer. She climbed back to safety, then leaning down through the aperture, she sent the chair spinning with her broom before she closed the door.

It was dark here. The Mexican girl stifled a sob at the anguish of a shriek close by. Cecily clamped a warning hand over her mouth. "Why, this is only a child!" she thought, and cuddled the slim, shivering body to her. They sat breathlessly while heavy boots clattered through the room below.

Hours passed before the frightful noise outside ebbed away. Occasionally it broke out anew, only to dull again into a muffled whimper.

Miguel and Teresa were made prisoners as soon as Arredondo arrived. "The Americans wouldn't have sought refuge in your house if they hadn't trusted you," was the inexorable retort to Salazar's protest. "You can't save your neck by turning your coat." Teresa was protected from the orgy, however. They were hustled off to a neighboring house, turned prison to accommodate the horde of captives.

Elizondo chose La Quinta for the general's headquarters but Arredondo rejected it. "Herd the commissary women here," he directed. "It's the largest house I've seen and that walled garden will make an excellent prison." Soon, hundreds of frightened creatures were herded there. The labor was apportioned among them. Corn was dumped there by the wagonload. Some were set to shelling it; others ground it into meal on stone metates, while still others baked the meal into tortillas over a hundred fires which ruined the beauty of the garden. They were kept busy. Relentless guards were ready with whips when any hands lagged.

Fires were started in a dozen sections of the town and the air was pungent with smoke. They did not spread rapidly, however, because so many buildings were stone. Cecily had begun to hope as the clamor of agony began to decrease, that she and her companion might somehow get away undetected, but she grew conscious of a new menace. The smoke that had hung in the air became stifling. She feared their choking would betray them. Then she heard the crackling of flames. A red glow filtered through the cracks in the puncheon floor. The house was on fire!

The blaze ate its way slowly forward. At last one section of the loft was aglow, but their avenue of escape still was safe: the flames had not reached the trap door. The two girls retreated before the heat.

Cecily was not yet ready to quit her refuge but terror seized the Mexican girl.

"It is to die here," she cried in her broken English.

Cecily heard her drop safely to the floor below and listened with dismay to the jeers that hailed her as she darted from the house. They strengthened her resolve to stay where she was. She retreated to the farthest corner. The flames were red in the open trap; it was too late to escape that way, even if she wanted to.

The row of buildings faced a small plaza, with no exit to the rear. She knew the house was watched from the front, but at the back she might have a chance. She tore at the thatch above her. It was tightly bound, but her energy was desperate

and once the first straw came free, the rest yielded to her tugging fingers. She burrowed the opening wider, gulping at the fresh air.

The loft had become an oven. Her body dripped with sweat and she was so weak she could barely squeeze through.

The thatch was ablaze at the far end, smoldering here. In the ruddy glare her eyes scanned the avenue of escape. No one there! With a sob of relief she slid from the eaves. She clutched at the stone wall as she dropped, trying to break her fall, but this threw her off balance and she fell backward as she hit the ground.

Her head struck something sharp. A thundering sounded in her ears; the flames above seemed to spin dizzily. Then she lost consciousness.

Chapter 20

In Ruthless Hands

JONATHAN'S ANXIETY over Cecily made the sweltering afternoon seem to last forever. Cris grew feverish from his wound. Occasionally he babbled incoherently and then one of his companions would creep to the river's edge for water to saturate his bandages and moisten his lips. He fell asleep finally but even then his rest was uneasy.

"The *gachupines* surely won't harm women, will they, Jess?" Jonathan asked.

"What do you think?"

"I think I'd better get started," he said. He was afraid to think.

He was forced to wait until the intermittent firing ebbed into the distance as the pursuit gradually pushed northward, however. The sun was still three hours high when he left.

Jess was loath to see him go. "You wait with Cris," he urged. "I'm like a cat in the night. You know that. I'll fetch her through the lines. I'll have her here by mornin'. Then we can head for the Louisiana border."

Jonathan wouldn't agree. "In some ways you have the hardest job," he said. "Just waiting here, not knowing what's going on and unable to do anything about it is tough—tougher than having something to do."

The scout gave him advice and warned him to be careful. "Smear mud on your face to darken it. San Antonio won't be a healthy place for Americans right now. And don't take off that hat. Whoever heard of a red-headed Mexican?"

It was agreed that unless some word came from Jonathan, Jess would follow him the next night. "Don't waste time hunting me," the Virginian added. "Getting Cissy out of there is the important thing."

The woodsman had another suggestion: "If you don't find Cissy right off, go to the Savias' house. I reckon that's whar she'd go if she war huntin' friends. Pablo's folks will help you, and if you don't show up, that's whar I'll come fust."

Caution slowed Jonathan. He avoided the path of the Spanish army, skulking furtively from cover to cover. Twice he glimpsed enemy patrols in the distance. The first time he crouched in a thicket and watched them pass; the second, he was caught in the open and lay prone in the grass, not even daring to raise his eyes until the sound of their horses died away. He had no hint of the carnage which marked the pursuit until sunset; by avoiding the trail he missed the butchery.

He was skirting a copse of oaks when he saw them: seven headless bodies dangling by their heels from the twisted branches! He was gripped by such a rage as he had never known. It shook him like a fever. Fear of what he might find in the town hurried his steps. After nightfall there was less need for prudence, and soon there was a red glare in the sky to guide him. That whetted his concern. Where would Cecily turn for refuge if they were burning the town? His impulse was to throw aside all wariness for speed, but what help could he bring Cecily if he were caught?

Concepcion *acequia* had its source at La Villita where it tapped the river and flowed almost due south. It offered the most direct approach, its friendly bank a screen for his movements. He had to increase his vigilance. Flames spangled the sky, lighting his way too well for safety. Sounds reached him, wails mingled with the stridency of male voices. Although waiting shredded his patience, there was nothing he could do until the streets were deserted. He was not close enough to note the extent of the savagery, but his apprehension mounted as the minutes passed.

It was after midnight before the hubbub gradually subsided and he crept from his hiding place. Half the houses were blackened skeletons, with windows blank like eye sockets. Those spared the flames had their own desolation: doors swung crazily from broken hinges, and furniture abandoned by the looters littered the street. Nowhere was there a sign of life. As he searched the wreckage where he had hoped to find

Cecily, each ravaged detail seared his mind. He whispered blasphemies.

Presently he heard a whimpering and he felt his way through the shadows to locate it. To the rear of a ruined house he found a girl sobbing on the ground.

"What is it, child?" His voice was gentle.

She cowered at the sound, and clutched her torn garment to her.

"Don't be afraid. I won't harm you."

His English reassured her. "An *americano!* They weel keel you if they find you here."

He knelt beside her. His face grew stormy as she stammered out her story in broken words. He was silent when she ended. He looked across the river toward San Antonio.

"Can you walk?" he asked at last.

"I weel try, señor," she promised.

"Then get as far away from town as you can. Hide in the woods along the river. I think you'll find others there to keep you company."

He watched her go before he turned toward the town. To use the ford was to invite trouble. Instead, he slipped silently into the stream some distance above, holding his rifle and powder horn above his head to keep them dry if he should have to swim. His choice of a crossing was fortunate; the water came only to his armpits. The mud blackening his face had cracked in the heat and he stopped at the river's edge to renew it before he went on. He was glad he had done so when he saw the sentry seated on the bank above the ford. Jonathan loosened his knife and left his rifle behind as he crept forward. He made no sound save the swish of his weapon as he buried it between the shoulder blades of the nodding soldier. His strong fingers closed about the throat to prevent an outcry.

Jonathan dragged the body down the bank and dumped it into the stream. Then he retrieved his rifle and went on.

The Plaza de las Yslas was the heart of San Antonio. Here stood pretentious homes, the church, several shops. But on the east side was a row of humble dwellings and the Savias' house was one of these. Once inside the town, Jonathan encountered no more sentries and he hugged the shadows as he made his

swift way toward the plaza. The house was dark, its door barred. He tried it cautiously before tapping on the weather-beaten panels. No response.

"Inez!" His voice sounded loud against the stillness. "Inez Savias!" he called, and rapped again. Still no answer.

Two soldiers clumped diagonally across the plaza and the Virginian huddled in the doorway till they had passed. Then he turned to the long Spanish window defended by twisted bars, projecting like a bay. "Inez!" he called again. "Inez Savias!"

"Who is it?" a voice finally challenged.

Jonathan pressed closer to the bars and whispered. "It's Jonathan Kirk. Let me in, before I'm seen."

The door opened quickly. Pablo's mother was an old friend. Her withered frailty had spared her from the day's excesses.

"I thought you were dead," she whispered. "You will be if they find you here, señor. You must not stay."

"I'm hunting Cecily," he explained. "Have you seen her?"

"I have not seen her," she said at last, "but if you knew the things that happened here, you wouldn't ask."

"I've got to find her," Jonathan groaned. "I'll search every house in this town until I do. I'll kill these *gachupines* one by one if I have to."

Inez agreed to help him. She could pass about the streets freely, and it should not be too hard for her to locate an American girl. She knew the risk of hiding him but did not hesitate. He should stay in her house. There were only two rooms and there was no loft in the flat-roofed building, but there were several sacks of charcoal in the kitchen and a few others of corn. The charcoal would be all right but there was danger that the food would be requisitioned for the army. So they removed the top layer of ears from each sack and spread fa over the top. They stacked them in the corner in such a wa that a niche was left where a man might crouch with safet One sack covered the entrance. The space was cramped but it was the best they could arrange, and it was meant for use onl in emergency.

Cecily was still unconscious when two soldiers found her.

"Here's another woman," one shouted gleefully, but the other looked down in scorn.

"Someone's abandoned her here. You're too late, *amigo*. By the looks of her she's fit for no further pleasure tonight."

"An *americano* too, and young. What a pity we didn't find her sooner!"

The night was bright from the flames crackling in the thatch, and they were looking down at her admiringly when she opened her eyes. Dazed from the fall, she did not remember at once what had happened. She was conscious of terror without remembering its cause, and she glanced first at the curling blaze above her. It was their voices that recalled the point of her fear. She tried to scramble to her feet, escape her one frantic thought. Rough hands seized her before she left her knees.

"I like her looks," the man who had discovered her decided. "I'll take her with me. I'd like to have an *americano* girl." Cecily didn't understand their Spanish but their intent was clear enough. She struggled to free herself. Her captor struck her a blow that bruised her cheek and sent her reeling.

"I like 'em wild," he assured his companion. "I know how to tame 'em." He lurched into the street, dragging the dazed girl after him. Their appearance was the signal for loud jeers.

Elizondo was collecting prisoners. The first fury of the debauchery spent, further vengeance was to be of a military nature. "Arrest every person of prominence!" Arredondo instructed. "Particularly Americans. I want captives."

The colonel's patrol encountered Cecily's captor. "Is that an *americano* you have?" the officer demanded.

"*Si*, señor. I'm keeping this one."

Elizondo crowded his horse forward. "We're making prisoners of all *yanquis*," he retorted. "You'll have to find another woman."

Cecily was herded roughly among other hostages between two ranks of bayonets. The family of Captain Antonio Ruiz, the alcalde, was there—his father a bent, gray man in his seventies, and his wife a plump, tearful matron.

There was no jail big enough to hold them all; eight hundred citizens had been placed under arrest. Three adjoining

houses were selected at random to serve as their prison. All were crowded and Cecily was assigned to the worst. Reeking air assailed her when the door was opened. "No more, no more," the captives protested.

"We're suffocating now!" groaned one.

She stumbled across the threshold and collided with a human wall. "That is 228," someone counted aloud before the door was closed. The room was twenty-four feet square, its windows were tightly shuttered, and its heat was almost beyond endurance that sweltering August night. There was no space to sit down, and still they thrust more prisoners in. Each new arrival was given a number; by the time the count had reached three hundred the guards could not squeeze in another. No eye could pierce the blackness, but there was no need to see; none could move. The place grew dank with perspiration and fetid with its odor. The whole tight room seemed to gasp as tortured lungs sought air.

Cecily fought against the dizziness which came and went during the early hours. Later she welcomed it; half-conscious, she could more easily endure the suffering. Someone collapsed against her shoulder. "He's fainted," she thought; "he'll be all right presently." She tried to stretch an arm around him but it was pinned to her side. Her clothes were sodden. A sharp pain burned in her chest; breathing grew more difficult. Her head throbbed. Time seemed interminable.

"Surely another day has passed," she said to herself once. "It's just this blackness. We can't tell day from night in here. Perhaps it's been two days."

They blinked in the unaccustomed light when the door was finally opened, and their breath rasped as they gulped in the fresh air. It took time to get them out, so closely were they packed. They were dazed and many fell when no longer supported by the wall of flesh about them. There were some who didn't rise; eighteen had died during the night but, sustained by the mass of their fellows, had been unable to fall.

All prisoners were marched to the plaza to witness the executions Arredondo had ordered. Fortunately it was close by or they never would have made it. The troops and the prisoners were practically the only audience. The rest of the wounded

town was in hiding. Cecily listened dully while the drums rolled. A sergeant stepped out to read the names of the day's victims. There would be a public execution each day, he announced, as a warning of the fate which awaited all rebels. Eight names were called; five were Americans trapped at La Quinta, the other three natives of the town who had been too old to fight. The alcalde's father was one of these.

The victims were lined up against a building, their hands bound behind them. They expected a firing squad but the execution had been planned differently. A company of soldiers with fixed bayonets was called forward. Bullets were reserved for honorable enemies. Cecily closed her eyes when the order was given, but she knew when the cruel blades reached their marks by the shudder of her neighbors.

That was not the end. Arredondo had taxed his ingenuity for further indignities. Each body was dragged around the plaza behind a mule before dismemberment; the heads, arms and legs were ordered displayed in prominent places where all might see the vengeance of the Spanish king.

The prisoners were silent, their senses numbed by successive blows, but one woman screamed when the bayonets cut down her husband, and, here and there, sobs wracked a reluctant witness. Some, like Cecily, closed their eyes to shut out the bestial scene.

The Savias' house fronted the plaza where the executions were staged. Jonathan and Inez lurked behind the window. He scanned the prisoners herded before the bayonets. His eye missed Cecily. She bore scant likeness to the girl he remembered—her face smudged with dust and soot, her hair hanging in a forgotten tangle, her dress still dank from the Black Hole. Even her walk deceived him; there was none in this stumbling throng with Cecily's alert step. She could not be one of these weary, shuffling creatures.

He recognized some of the doomed men and, as he saw them die, new furrows tightened about his bloodless lips and his blue eyes were deadly cold.

The women were being separated from the men. Jonathan had a chance to search their ranks again as they were driven past his hiding place. His eyes darkened when at last they

found her. Could that bent, faltering figure be Cecily? Inez winced as his fingers clutched her shoulder.

"You must find out where they're taking them," he whispered.

Sergeant Jesus Gonzalez liked his job. It was not every soldier who lived in a great house and slept on linen sheets. He strutted about La Quinta's apartments, wallowing in their luxury, but the thing that gratified him most was his new authority, three hundred women subject to his discipline. He was a cruel overseer, ready with the lash. It wasn't just that the army had two thousand stomachs waiting for his tortillas. There was something about the sting of a whip on quivering flesh that gratified his jaundiced spirit. He occupied Teresa's room. The contents of her trunks were strewn about it. Their silken texture titillated him; his gnarled fingers pawed the fripperies and his eyes gleamed at their intimacy.

He had one resentment. The women here were old, his selection limited. When his first choice resisted him he had her flogged as an example for the rest. The next one came cringing at his call and he garbed her in Teresa's finery. It was designed for a far daintier figure but his blunt fingers ripped at the fragile gown, and he guffawed at her unexpected bulges, protruding through the torn silk.

His pleasure was interrupted by the late arrival of fresh prisoners and he felt irritated as he shuffled down the stairs. There were seven of them, whom Elizondo had sent because there was no more room elsewhere. The sergeant was grumbling, impatient to end this business, as he ordered candles brought.

When the lights were fetched and he could look the group over, his sly eyes grew round and he moistened his lips. He was no longer in a hurry to return to the cowering woman who waited in his bed. This slender girl with the yellow hair was more to his liking. Her chin was lifted proudly and her amber eyes were scornful. She would need a lesson in servility perhaps, but he didn't mind that. On the contrary.

For hours Teresa had shared Salazar's cell. They were not

alone: Elizondo had a list of the more prominent families and these were being brought in as fast as the troops could find them. There was no room for recriminations in that crowded place. Miguel was composed, depending now on the power of his despised father's name. Uneasiness made Teresa sullen. When the women were called out to make room for other men, her hope revived; after all, the royalists would not make war on them. Her confidence mounted when she was escorted to her own house. She didn't understand why the others were brought here too, but she was too concerned to give them much thought. The guards in the hall dismayed her, and she recognized the lustful gleam in the sergeant's eye.

She clutched at her pride, trying to show her contempt, but the emptiness of fear was inside her and her legs trembled with weakness.

"Your name?" the sergeant barked at the nearest prisoner.

"Doña Amelia Ruiz." This was the alcalde's wife.

Jesus Gonzalez plucked at his lower lips; his eyes squinted at the proud lady who faced him. His mind was on the taming of the girl with the yellow hair and this seemed a good chance. "I do not like your tone," he grumbled. "It lacks the proper respect. Thirty lashes for this one."

Teresa watched incredulously as two soldiers started to drag Doña Amelia away.

"No!" shouted the sergeant. "Flog her here. It will teach these others not to defy me."

Brutal hands tore at Doña Amelia's dress, ripping it from her back. She tried to shield her nakedness with her hands, gasping her indignation. They wrenched her arms free and forced her toward the stairs where they bound her wrists to the banister above her head so that her toes barely touched the floor. Each blow of the whistling whip left its raw mark on the smooth flesh. As they fell the sergeant numbered them aloud without once looking. His beady eyes were on Teresa whose teeth nibbled at her lower lip. He could mark each bite of the lash by the quiver of her hands.

"Does anyone else doubt my authority?" Jesus Gonzalez demanded after the unconscious woman had been cut down. He glared at the pale faces before him. None answered. "Take

'em away," he continued gruffly. "Make sure they each shell a bushel of corn before they go to sleep."

Teresa would have followed the others but the sergeant caught her by the wrist. "Wait!" he ordered, and tested the softness of her hands with his thumb. "You've never shelled corn, have you?"

She shook her head.

"Within an hour these pretty fingers will be as raw as that woman's back. And if you slow up, there's always a guard ready with a whip to keep you at your job. But," he grinned, "I'm the master here. I can make life very pleasant for those I like. You've nothing to fear, if you are—obedient."

His words filtered through her stupor. She was not outraged by his suggestion: all her luxury had been bought by her body. But her fastidiousness was offended. His cruel eyes, the disarray of his uniform, the reek of stale sweat revolted her.

"There's the whip for those who defy me," he reminded her. With a swift movement his rough fingers bared her back. "Such a smooth, tender skin!" His voice purred. "It would be a pity to tear it with a scourge. The scars never go away." He wrenched his gaze reluctantly from her enticing softness to nod toward the alcalde's wife. "It's too much for the tender ones. They usually die. You can see for yourself."

Teresa stared in silence at the raw ribbons streaking the unconscious woman's flesh. She grew queasy and the smile she turned on him was a conscious effort; he must not guess the repugnance she felt.

She leaned against him as they slowly climbed the stairs. Her strength seemed to have vanished; the climb was difficult. He mistook her lassitude. His eyes were bloodshot; his blood was singing. She stopped at the door of her own room. In the sick light of a single candle the chaos of her finery appalled her. Gonzalez advanced toward the bed. "Get out," he ordered its cringing occupant. "I want no more of you."

Teresa watched dully as the woman fled, recognizing the torn apparel as her own. But it didn't anger her; nothing seemed to matter any more.

Life was very full for Sergeant Gonzalez. He had authority,

luxury and a straight-limbed girl in his couch whom a colonel might have coveted. But he lacked an opportunity to display his good fortune before his fellows. He pictured their awe when they saw him with that golden creature at his side. The public executions would have given him this very chance, but he had to stay on his job. Corn had to be ground, tortillas baked and his weary captives had fallen behind schedule. He had been promised more workers. The prisons were to be emptied of women for him. When they arrived things would be easier, but now he fumed.

He paid little heed to the new arrivals, satisfied that there were none among them to match his girl, though he noted with approval that many were young. It would speed up the work and give him more leisure. Consequently, he was delighted by the announcement that more prisoners were to be slaughtered publicly that afternoon. This was his opportunity.

He ordered Teresa to choose from the litter of garments the one best calculated to exhibit her charms. The whole army should see what an important fellow Sergeant Gonzalez had become. She shrank from the thought of this display. Her distaste for him was acute, but she knew better than to defy him. There was no longer a Maria to comb her hair and her own fingers were unfamiliar with the chore. It took long; her thoughts had ample time to probe a bleak future. What did it hold? Even if Miguel won release, could they make their way back to safety? The ambitions they had shared seemed very remote now. She thought of Jonathan for the first time in days. Things might be different if he were alive. It was odd how so much of her fate had been influenced by him. Once his death might have given her a throne; he had died too late to help her and too soon to save her from this ignominy. She was sure no Americans had escaped.

She turned her uneasy mind to the present. Officers were here who would eventually return to Mexico City. There, she'd be on familiar ground. Perhaps the sergeant's eagerness to parade her before his friends had its merit. Other eyes would recognize her perfection. What could the sergeant do if an officer demanded her? Her eyes brightened; she selected each detail of the costume with care.

Once more the plaza was thronged. The prisoners, in dense ranks, silently watched the little knot of the doomed who had been plucked from among them. Soldiers off duty pressed against the guards, shouting taunts at the men whose deaths they had come to witness. Sergeant Gonzalez elbowed a path through the crowd, proudly conscious of the stir his companion was creating. Teresa clung to him for protection, angered by the coarse jests. One pinched her arm and another spanked her—liberties they would not risk if she were with an officer.

"Let's stand there." She indicated a spot in the front row beyond reach of these familiarities; but that was not the only reason she chose it: how could an officer be expected to discover her among the pushing soldiery?

From here she could view the men awaiting death—twelve of them, ranged against the wall of a building, the certainty of their fate stark in their faces. Her eyes did not linger on them. They hunted for the glitter of a uniform.

Miguel saw her before she saw him. Her dress was a vivid splash against the motley crowd. He measured her escort with bitter eyes. She'd lost no time in finding a protector. His scrutiny informed him she was back at La Quinta; how else had she recovered her wardrobe? The sight of her prodded his defiance. The futility of this wretched end had overwhelmed him; now his pride revived. At least she should see how he could die. He tried to assure himself that he had only loathing for her fickle selfishness, but he could not turn his glance from her.

The end drew close. The file of soldiers fixed its bayonets and their steel clatter interrupted Teresa's quest. She turned and her glance was no longer casual. The victims were scraping up their courage now, trying to bolster the dignity of their final minutes. It was revealed by their stiffening backs and the tightness of their paling faces. Some of them wore stained bandages and their clothing was in tatters, except for one whose neat raiment drew her gaze. The silk hose attracted her attention first. She lifted her eyes and then clutched at the sergeant for support.

"What's wrong now?" her escort growled. Queer how pinched and sharp her features looked out here in the sun. He

hadn't noticed it before; she must be older than he thought.

Miguel saw her stagger. It helped him summon a shadowy smile at the end. He was watching her instead of the approaching bayonet.

The captain missed the execution. His attention was fixed on the girl in the yellow dress. How came such a lovely creature here? She was breath-taking and the richness of her silks was unmistakable. Look how she grasped that sergeant's sleeve. How had such a prize fallen into those coarse hands?

Closer inspection whetted his desire, but still he hesitated to step in. The girl was leaning on her escort's arm; perhaps she was really enamored of the fellow. It didn't make sense, but you could never tell about women. He followed the couple, tempted by her beauty but uncertain.

Teresa had forgotten her errand. The sight of Miguel, ranked in that desperate company, had staggered her. She felt no pity.

She had hated him too long for that. Her face was stony when she saw him die.

The blow was to her hope. Until that moment she had clung to the belief that this was only temporary. She did not have to share this wretched people's fate. There would be a way out. It helped her bear the sergeant. Now she wasn't sure. Miguel had become just a sodden bundle in the dust. She was desperately afraid.

She heard the jingle of a sword behind her and looked back. Then her sudden weakness passed. She was smiling again and her eyes warmed at the captain's bow.

He lacked experience. Teresa read his confusion and her assurance quickened.

This should be easy to manage.

"Why, Captain!" she exclaimed. "When did you arrive? Why didn't you call on me at once?"

"I didn't know where to find you," he replied lamely.

"You know him?" Sergeant Gonzalez demanded uneasily.

The captain kissed her hand. "My dear cousin," he murmured, "I hope this fellow hasn't annoyed you."

The sergeant held his breath.

"He has been very kind," Teresa replied, "but I'll no longer need his protection now that you're here."

Sergeant Gonzalez watched them go. "I might have known it was too good to last," he muttered. It did not help his temper when she sent for her wardrobe.

He didn't believe it was hers, but since an officer was waiting, he dared not protest.

Jonathan saw Teresa pass his hiding place. He had imagined her secure in Salazar's protection, but the swaggering sergeant's possessiveness was too obvious. His eyes narrowed. This was no hapless victim. She swayed too confidently on the arm of her burly soldier, her head was held high. He saw the captain's bow and guessed her change of escorts before it happened.

"She'll manage!" he muttered. "She'll always manage. Slut!"

Chapter 21

At La Quinta

A STOOPED and shabby figure flitted unheeded through the streets. If any eyes were curious the sleazy shawl disclosed her wrinkles. No one troubled Inez Savias. Jonathan couldn't have found a better ferret. She was watching when Cecily was crowded through the doors of La Quinta with the other prisoners, and she had no trouble discovering the use of this new prison.

The word she brought cheered the Virginian. However hard the labor, he felt that Cecily would be safe from the soldiery there and he was encouraged by his knowledge of the place. His visits to Teresa had familiarized him with its plan, and the river still offered access to the garden.

Arredondo ordered another search of San Antonio, trying to unearth more victims for his executioners. The soldiers were thorough. Inez' eyes revealed her alarm when she brought the news.

"I'll be safe enough," Jonathan assured her. "As soon as I'm hidden you must leave. Stay away until the hunt is over. I don't want them blaming you if I'm found here."

She protested but he explained why this was necessary. Retribution would be swift for anyone found harboring an American. "I don't want you taking risks," he told her. "You must be here to guide Jess if anything happens to me."

He concealed his rifle in the chimney. If caught, he must rely on his knife. Inez piled the last sack of charcoal over the entrance after he squeezed into his niche. Then she departed.

Soldiers searched the place cursorily. From his refuge he heard the crash of breaking pottery and the ripping of bayonets as they prodded the shuck pallet. The bare rooms offered scant shelter except for the sacks piled in the corner.

"What's this?" a trooper demanded, and tilted a sack so that charcoal cascaded to the floor.

Jonathan held his breath to keep from coughing as the black dust choked him. He gripped his knife more tightly.

"Shall we move them all?" someone asked.

"It's too hot for that," another answered. "This is an easier way." He thrust a bayonet between the sacks, grunting with each jab. The bags were a thick bulwark, but once the prying blade found its mark—its sharp point sliced his thigh. He clenched his teeth. If there was red on the withdrawing blade, the sacks wiped it clean. The searchers left, satisfied the house was deserted.

Jonathan moved a bag cautiously till he could peer out. The door stood open, revealing the room to any passer-by. He dared not shift his cramped position. A warm trickle bathed one leg. The wound began to throb. He shoved the sack back hurriedly when a soldier, beckoned by the swinging door, came prowling to look for loot. It didn't take him long to see there was none here. The day smoldered slowly to an end. Jonathan's thirst became a torture.

When Inez crept back, the tousled room threw her into panic. She rushed to the heaped sacks. Jonathan's sweat-streaked face and the red puddle in which he crouched added to her fright. "What have they done to you?" she cried.

Jonathan limped across the floor, testing his leg. "I can still walk," he told her; "it can't be serious." But he winced with each step; the muscles were stiffening.

Inez did what she could for him. She dared not call aid, but she heated water and the steaming cloths assuaged the pain and relieved the rigid tendons. At his urging she wrapped the bandage tight for greater ease in walking.

Sergeant Gonzalez' inflamed eyes peered sullenly at the soldiers who crowded the smoke-filled *cantiña*. He did not join in their hilarity, but drank alone and cursed his loss. His temper was on edge when he finally reeled homeward.

"Where are the new women?" he demanded of the guard in the hall. "Fetch 'em in where it's light. I want to look 'em over."

There were nearly two hundred of the newcomers, herded through the house in batches for Gonzalez' surly inspection. Cecily marched with the last dazed lot. The sergeant's story was well known among the women. She tried to hide behind them, shrinking against the wall.

Gonzalez' eye spotted her and gleamed. "That one." He pointed at the frightened girl. "Drag her out here. I like her."

When they seized her, Cecily tried to cling to her neighbors but the soldiers only laughed at her struggles. She faced her tormentor defiantly.

"She'll do," Gonzalez approved. "I like her better than the other. She has more fire."

"No, no, I'll not go." Once more she writhed futilely.

"Shall I bring the whip, Sergeant?" a soldier asked hopefully.

He shook his head. "And ruin the only pretty one left? Leave her to me. I'll break her in."

Jess arrived at midnight. Jonathan was watching from the window and had the door unbarred before he knocked. "How's Cris?"

"Better. 'Twarn't much more'n a scratch. Have you found out whar Cissy is?"

Jonathan told him what he had learned and outlined the plan he had been formulating. "That's the garden you and I visited once by boat and we'll go back the same way. Once we're past their guards the rest should be easy."

They offered to take Inez with them but she shook her head. "With me it's different. This is my home and these are my people. It's too late to transplant a tree with roots as old as mine."

"Someday we'll be back," Jonathan assured her. "The next time we'll come to stay. This isn't good-by, Inez, it's *hasta la vista.*"

"May it be soon!" the woman replied as they slipped out the door.

Jonathan had said nothing about his wound, but Jess noticed his limp. "What's the matter?" he whispered as they slunk through still streets.

Jonathan told him. "It isn't bothering me much now but it had me worried for a time."

They headed due south, keeping in the lee of the buildings until the town was behind them. This took them past La Quinta's front, where they could see sentries lounging against the walls. Clearly, they considered the enclosure barricade enough.

There was a ford two hundred yards south of the house. They crossed the river there and doubled back toward San Antonio, gliding noiselessly through the thickets. They were using all their woodcraft; stealth was essential but time was short. There was much to do before dawn. Jonathan was elated when they found the boat still hidden beneath the willows. So much had happened since he had tied it there that he half expected it to be gone.

They decided against using oars; the splash might betray them. Instead, Jess gave the skiff a powerful shove, hoping its momentum would carry them across the narrow stream. Their glide was quiet, but they had not reckoned on the current. They were forced to pole the last half of the distance.

They were now on the right side of the river and about a hundred yards above their destination. The moon was sinking and the west bank was matted with shadows. They relied on these to shroud them as they began their wary drifting, hugging the bank, their eyes straining against the gloom. Their rifles were propped in the bow, useless until this part of the adventure was ended: a shot would bring an army swarming about them.

Moonlight warned them when their goal was close. The sheltering trees stopped abruptly at the garden. Jess grasped an overhanging limb, halting the boat. Beyond, a sentry paced the water's edge, clearly discernible in the pale light. They waited till he turned at the wall, then stepped noiselessly ashore. This guard was easy to elude but he might prove dangerous. Should an alarm be sounded, he menaced their retreat. They crouched in the cover of the shrubbery and waited, knives in hand, for his return.

His deliberate steps crunched on the gravel path. As the sound grew louder, Jonathan tensed for the final lunge. Five

more steps and he would be abreast of them. Crunch—crunch. Then the sound stopped.

Jess raised his head. The sentry had discovered their boat. He was slowly raising his rifle.

It might have been only the wind rippling the leaves. Except for the muted blow and the scrape of boots on the path as Jess eased the inert body to earth, there was no sound.

Their attack had not gone unobserved. "Have you come to free us?" A whisper from the terrace above startled them. None of the captives was asleep. The confusion of Gonzalez' midnight search had just subsided. Many had watched the scouts' entrance with prayerful hope.

"If any of you want to go I'll show you the way," Jonathan replied guardedly. "But I'm not sure it's wise unless you have a good hiding place. You're safer here than in the town." He explained their errand. "We're looking for Cecily Marsten. Who can tell me where to find her?"

A hush followed his question. "That's the American girl," one woman finally replied. "You've come too late, señor. She's not here."

"Where is she?"

The woman nodded toward the house and explained. "If you had only come a few minutes sooner!" she concluded.

In his fury, Jonathan was ready to storm the house. Jess restrained him. "Gittin' kilt won't help Cissy," he cautioned. "We've got to git her out of thar."

The women answered their abrupt questions as well as they could. There was a sentry in the lower hall; once past him they thought there would be no obstacle, as most of the guards were asleep. The scout pointed to a low wall which divided the patio from the garden. "Look up yonder," he suggested. "We don't need to go through the house."

It would be no feat to reach the windows above from the top of this barrier.

Jess scrambled up with ease but for Jonathan it was harder. The effort reopened his wound and he could not have made it without help. Soon they were skulking through a corridor where only a feeble light strayed up the stairs from below. The sound of voices drifted from the same direction.

Cecily was backed defiantly against the wall and the sergeant lurched toward her. They were alone. He had dismissed the guard and his senses were blurred by wine.

"Get upstairs!" he mumbled.

When she did not budge, he clutched at her. She was eying him warily and her movement was too swift for him. Dodging past his fumbling reach, she leaped for the door, intent on flight. It rattled against her weight but did not yield.

Gonzalez laughed. "There's no escape, my pretty one. The doors are bolted." Again he approached, more craftily this time, his arms outspread to trap her.

Cecily was familiar with the houses of San Antonio—the grills that defended their lower windows, the unbarred casements of the second floor. Once more she evaded him and darted for the stairs.

He grinned as he watched her go. Willing or not, she had obeyed his command.

"Cissy," someone whispered from the gloom of the upper hall. A strong hand gripped her. In a panic, she tried to wrench free.

"It's all right, Cissy. This is Jonty."

"Jonty!" She clung to him, unable to control her sudden trembling.

The befuddled sergeant climbed slowly, supporting himself against the rail. Jess Leeman's hand, reaching from above, tightened against his throat, snapped back his head, strangled the scream he tried to utter. A blade slid silently between his ribs.

They left the way they had come. Cecily whispered, "How did you find me?"

"Later," Jonathan replied. "There's no time to talk now. We'll tell you all about it when we get back to camp."

That encouraged her to hope: back to camp surely meant there were others waiting.

Three women lingered by the boat. Jonathan's warning had discouraged the rest, but these were determined to leave and they could not be refused. The tiny skiff would not hold them all, so Jess swam at the stern while Jonathan poled across the stream. Once the far bank was reached, the party divided, the

escaping captives heading west for the ranch of a kinsman while Cecily and the scouts turned south, intent on reaching Cris's hiding place before dawn.

Again they kept to the shelter of the river as much as possible. Speed was more important than caution now. They knew they would be hunted once the escape was discovered. They walked in single file, Jess leading, Cecily next, Jonathan bringing up the rear. Little was said until the town was far behind. Cecily dreaded to ask the questions which were troubling her, and the news he had to tell kept Jonathan silent. His wound was bothering him again. Each limping step increased his pain and it grew increasingly difficult for him to maintain the swift pace. In spite of his dogged persistence he began to lag. Jess noticed it and called a halt.

"Better let me help you," he suggested. "We'll make better time."

Jonathan wanted Cecily under cover before daybreak. "You two go ahead," he suggested. "I'll cover the back trail. I'll be all right after I've rested a spell."

"We'll stick together," Cecily insisted.

Jess agreed with her. "We ain't goin' to split up now. We all go or we all stay. I reckon I can find us a spot close by whar we can hole up for the day if you're played out."

"We'll keep going," Jonathan replied grimly. "I'll be all right after a few minutes' rest." He leaned against a tree to ease his throbbing wound. "We can't leave Cris alone."

The instant he said it, he realized what he had done; now Cecily knew. He had been groping for a way to tell her more gently.

"Where is he? Is he safe? . . . Father? . . . Tell me," she urged.

"Cris is all right." Jonathan's weary voice was expressionless. "He has a wound but it isn't serious."

"Jonty brought him back," Jess interrupted. "Thar warn't many of us left when we cut our way out."

"And the others? . . . Father?"

"I'm sorry, Cissy—" that same dead emptiness still marked Jonathan's tone—"I failed you. There weren't any others."

After the first bruised silence she wanted to know more, and

they told her how Ben Marsten had given his life for Denis O'Rourke.

Soon they resumed their plodding march. They left the river, veering westward toward the Medina, quickening their gait across the plains. Even in the dark they felt exposed when they left the shelter of the trees, and they took advantage of every cover that offered. This almost brought on disaster. They were heading for a motte of oaks when Jess suddenly gripped Cecily's arm and forced her to the ground. Jonathan was down instantly. Jess left them there, worming his way forward through the grass to investigate, and when he returned he led them silently back a hundred yards before he whispered his explanation. "Thar's a *gachupine* patrol camped yonder. It was one of their hosses I heard."

They evaded the enemy by slipping around their flank, and soon they were shadowed by the woods which followed the Medina's meandering course. To Jess's skilled eye the landmarks were clear.

"Cris is just round the next bend," he said.

The refuge was undisturbed but there was no sign of the wounded boy.

"Do you suppose he tried to follow you into San Antonio?" Cecily asked uneasily.

"He's probably crept down to the stream for water." Jonathan tried to express an encouragement he did not feel. "If he heard us coming, he's waiting to make sure we're friends."

"Cris," Cecily called in a low voice.

Jonathan limped down the bank, the others at his heels. The gloom was piled too thick for him to see the path and he was feeling his cautious way among the trees when he bumped into the swaying body.

"Wait." His voice was sharp as he identified it. "Take Cissy back," he ordered.

Jonathan told her what had happened but would not let her see her brother's hacked body. Anguished, she awaited their return in the dank gloom.

"I reckon I know who did this," Jess growled as he helped Jonathan scoop a shallow grave. "It war that gang of cut-

throats we dodged a while ago. They must have surprised Cris when he crept out for water. I'm goin' back an' settle for this. Thar's jist 'bout time afore sunup."

"We've got Cissy to think of," Jonathan replied. "It's their horses I want."

He returned to Cecily as soon as their task was finished. He was fumbled for something to say, and failed. Instead he took her in his arms and held her silently. Her eyes were dry, her body rigid.

It would be better, he thought, if she could cry. "It's time we started, Cissy," he said at last.

"I want to see his grave." Her voice was as dreary as the drip of rain from sodden boughs.

She followed them woodenly and sank to her knees by the heaped loam. The sobs so long choked back shook her body as her fingers moved over the damp mound.

Jonathan's hands were clumsy with tenderness when he drew her gently away.

"We can't wait any longer, Cissy. We've got to get out of here."

She was too preoccupied to notice that they were retracing their steps until they reached the point where the trail left the river. Here Jess scouted off alone for a few minutes. "I found you a hideout," he told her when he returned. "You must wait thar till we git back."

"Where are you going?" She grasped Jonathan's hand, trying to stifle her panic.

"After horses," he replied, "and that Spanish patrol we dodged an hour ago has them. There isn't much time. It'll soon be light."

"Take me with you," she urged. She could not be alone now.

"We can't do that. You'll be safe here."

"But what if you don't come back?" Her fingers were tight on his sleeve.

"Trust me, Cissy. I'll come back to you. There aren't enough *gachupines* in Mexico to stop me."

The two men approached the sleeping camp with patient stealth. Jonathan had his pistol and rifle; Jess had Cris's weapon

and his own. They hovered in the shadows until the position was thoroughly scouted. One sentry was posted at the edge of the thicket but his vigilance did not match their craft. The horses were tethered in a clearing about twenty yards from the sleeping men and their number revealed the strength of the party. Twelve. The odds were not too great. The Virginian selected three saddles and began his cautious preparations while his companion slunk off to silence the sentry. Two animals were saddled by the time Jess reappeared; there had been no sound.

Wan light was beginning to seep through the leaves by the time their task was completed.

Jess wanted to invade the camp itself and take the stacked rifles.

"We could capture the whole bunch," he whispered. "I'd make 'em pay for what they done to Cris."

Jonathan's fury was just as great but his first throught was for Cecily.

"That'll have to wait till Cissy's safe," he declared.

They mounted quietly. Jonathan was leading the spare horse and the other animals had been cut loose. There should be no pursuit from this party.

"One shot apiece," he cautioned. "Save your other weapon against the time you'll need it if we run into trouble." He selected a mark and leveled his pistol.

Jess aimed at another.

"For Cris," Jess said, before he fired.

The shots helped them stampede the horses. They were well away before the startled camp was fully aroused. Several bullets whined after them harmlessly, but by then they were almost beyond range, still yelling as they drove the herded animals.

Their opponents were afoot; immediate danger was past. Now they had horses they could manage. They would get away.

Someday they would come back. It might be ten years—fifteen—but they would come back. Cissy was alone now. Jonathan decided he would take her to Natchitoches or even Natchez, and they would make a home there until another Magee rose up to lead them.

Cecily heard them coming. She ran toward them, forsaking her shelter.

"She hadn't ought to do that," Jess complained. "How'd she know we warn't Spaniards?"

Jonathan didn't answer. He understood her eagerness. It matched his. His eyes kindled as he realized that coming back to Cecily would always be his most urgent concern. He spurred his horse into a gallop.

The scout's mount would have followed, but he checked it and continued his slow jog. His scarred face softened in a smile when he saw Jonathan leap to the ground and take Cecily in his arms.

"Reckon he woke up," he said aloud, "an' high time!"

THE END

Take Your Pick from These Hard-to-Get Best-Selling Books!

Now you may enjoy many hours of exciting reading pleasure at a small fraction of the original cost. These POPULAR LIBRARY books are complete, full-length editions of successful novels formerly priced at $2.00 or more.

If your bookseller or newsdealer cannot supply you, order by mail from POPULAR LIBRARY, INC., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Enclose 30c (which includes cost of mailing and handling) for each book ordered. If you order 4 books or more, we pay the postage and you need only enclose 25c per book.

Please order by number. Mail in your list promptly, as only a limited number of copies of each of these select titles is still available.

Mysteries

189 THE DEATH WISH, by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding
188 THE YELLOW OVERCOAT, by Frank Gruber
168 DEATH AND TAXES, by David Dodge
159 ABOUT THE MURDER OF THE CIRCUS QUEEN, by Anthony Abbot
122 THE ADVENTURES OF DR. THORNDYKE, by R. Austin Freeman
109 I'LL SING AT YOUR FUNERAL, by Hugh Pentecost
106 THE CORPSE WITH THE EERIE EYE, by R. A. J. Walling
105 THE CASE IS CLOSED, by Patricia Wentworth
99 DEAD OF THE NIGHT, by John Rhode
97 A VARIETY OF WEAPONS, by Rufus King
81 THREE THIRDS OF A GHOST, by Timothy Fuller
76 FOG, by Valentine Williams and Dorothy Rice Sims
75 SHE FADED INTO AIR, by Ethel Lina White
74 MURDER IN SEASON, by Octavus Roy Cohen
73 HASTY WEDDING, by Mignon G. Eberhart
72 WHO KILLED AUNT MAGGIE? by Medora Field
71 HELL LET LOOSE, by Francis Beeding
70 MR. POLTON EXPLAINS, by R. Austin Freeman
67 MURDER ON THE YACHT, by Rufus King

(Continued on next page)

65 THE WOMAN IN THE PICTURE, by John August
64 THEY CAN'T HANG ME, by James Ronald
63 SING A SONG OF HOMICIDE, by James R. Langham

Westerns

172 PISTOL PARDNERS, by William MacLeod Raine
160 THE SILVER STAR, by Jackson Gregory
157 THE FLYING U STRIKES, by B. M. Bower
152 RANCHER'S REVENGE, by Max Brand
146 HOPALONG CASSIDY TAKES CARDS, by Clarence E. Mulford
142 GUARDIANS OF THE DESERT, by Tom Gill
141 WINTER RANGE, by Alan LeMay
140 SECRET VALLEY, by Jackson Gregory

Specials

200 BATS IN THE BELFRY, by Norman Matson
186 CARTOON FUN: Laugh Hits from the Nation's Top Wits
156 POPULAR BOOK OF WESTERN STORIES, Edited by Leo Margulies
155 THE DREADFUL NIGHT, by Ben Ames Williams
150 CROSSWORD PUZZLES, Book Two
132 SEVEN KEYS TO BALDPATE, by Earl Derr Biggers
102 DUEL IN THE SUN, by Niven Busch

POPULAR LIBRARY, INC., Dept. PL
10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

Send me postpaid the POPULAR LIBRARY books I have checked. I enclose 25c (in coin or in U. S. stamps of small denominations) per copy. (NOTE: We pay postage for orders of four books or more. If ordering less than four books, please enclose 5c per book extra for postage.)

63	64	65	67	70	71	72	73
74	75	76	81	97	99	102	105
106	109	122	132	140	141	142	146
150	152	155	156	157	159	160	168
172	186	188	189	200			

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY & ZONE.....STATE.....

If you do not wish to clip this coupon provided for your convenience, please write a letter containing the information required.

224 Monte Barrett • SUN IN THEIR EYES POPULAR LIBRARY

"Don't ever stop, Darling!"

Teresa quivered under Jonathan's kisses. She arched her throat to his hungry lips. Then he was startled by the sound of ripping silk . . . She was Teresa de Lerdo, bastard child of an Indian woman and a Spanish grandee. He was Jonathan Kirk, daring leader of Kirk's Scouts in the first American invasion of Texas.

They were lovers caught up in the fierce fight to win an empire in the wilderness. But among the leaders of the invasion Kirk had a rival in Miguel Salazar, an adventurer gambling for a king's throne and lovely Teresa.

Here is an epic chapter out of America's lusty past, a vivid pageant of clashing armies mixed with the private drama of passion involving Kirk and the women he loved: black-haired Cecily and Teresa, the golden-haired wanton.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES